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The Body in St Maximus the Confessor

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CS	Cistercian Studies
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GNO	*Gregorii Nysseni Opera*
JTS NS	*Journal of Theological Studies New Series*
Lampe, *PGL*	G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979)
Morani	M. Morani (ed.), *Nemesii Emeseni. De Natura Hominis*
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
Percival	Henry R. Percival (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series xiv, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1900)

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Introduction

This book began some years ago in my mind in the form of a simple question: what happens to the body when it is deified? Or to put the question in more explicitly biblical terms, what happens when corporeal human beings become participants (κοινωνοί) in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1: 4)? This may appear, at first glance, a somewhat naive query. But it does not take long to discover that bound up with it is the question as to the status and function of the human body and the whole material order in God's creative and redemptive economies. And therefore it is directly related to the question as to the status and function of the sacraments, symbols, and external structures which have come definitively to characterize the speech and life of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'.

THE BODY IN THE THEOLOGICAL VISION OF ST MAXIMUS

In what follows I bring this question to a learned monk who is one of the profoundest of Byzantine saints and a faithful and fertile representative of the Greek patristic tradition: St Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Contemporary scholarship almost universally recognizes the genius and ecumenical significance of this man: he is 'the real father of Byzantine theology', [1]

[1] John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 131.

'the leading theologian of his era in the Greek East, probably in the entire church', [2]

[2] Jaroslav Pelikan, ' "Council or Father or Scripture": The Concept of Authority in the Theology of Maximus Confessor', in David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (eds.), *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of the Very Reverend George Vasilievich Florovsky* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195, Rome: Pontificale Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 277.

'one of the outstanding thinkers of all time', [3]

[3] Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 7.

'a *defensor fidei*, both with a singular intellectual perspicacity and with an invincible firmness of **end p.1**
character', [4]

[4] C. J. de Vogel, 'Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?', *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985), 38.

whose work 'synthesizes and condenses the essential heart of the spiritual and doctrinal experience of the great patristic era'. [5]

[5] I.-H. Dalmais, quoted by Alain Riou, *Le Monde et L'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Théologie Historique 22, Paris: Beauchesne, 1973), 33.

Moreover, St Maximus is also acknowledged to have afforded a particularly positive place for the body and the material world in his theological vision. Long before the rediscovery of Aristotle in the medieval West, he demonstrates 'a positive evaluation of the empirical man as such', [6]

[6] Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edn. (Chicago, and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1995), 95.

'a healthy appreciation of the nature of created realities', [7]

[7] George C. Berthold (trans.), *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 98 n. 195.

an appreciation which attains its 'culminating point' in his soteriologically motivated insistence upon the full integrity of Christ's human nature. [8]

[8] See Dumitru Staniloae on *Amb.Io*. 42 in Emmanuel Ponsoye (ed. and trans.), *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Ambigua* (Paris: Éditions de l'Ancre, 1994), 502.

'Maximus' thought more so than any of his predecessors is both incarnation- and creation-centred.' [9]

[9] Myroslaw Tataryn, 'The Eastern Tradition and the Cosmos', *Sobornost* 11/1-2 (1989), 48.

According to Orthodox scholar Panayiotis Nellas, even 'dust' is no longer simply 'matter' for Maximus, but 'carries in actual fact the "principle" and the "form" of man'. [10]

[10] Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person,* trans. Norman Russell (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 65.

'Far from offering a theology and a mysticism alienated from the world,' says Hans Urs von Balthasar in his seminal monograph on the saint, Maximus' synthesis of the sensible and spiritual in the human being amounts to nothing less than a recovery of 'the tradition of genuine Hellenic humanism'. [11]

[11] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners*, 2nd edn. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1988), 289. English translation by Brian E. Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 291.

These contemporary commendations could be ratified by even the most cursory evaluation of Maximus' integral influence on the subsequent Greek theological tradition. It is in clear debt to Maximus' dyophysite christology that St John Damascene can point to the physical body of Christ as the concrete means of **end p.2** human participation in God. [12]

[12] Joh.D. *Imag*. 1.19 (PG 94. 1249b-d); 2.14 (PG 94. 1300a-d); *Orth*. 3.28 (PG 94. 1097b-1100c).

It is Maximus whom Gregory Palamas cites in defence of the notably *physical* aspects of hesychast prayer when he affirms that it is 'through this body and by bodily means' that the faithful will behold the uncreated light of God. [13]

[13] Gr.Pal. *Tr*. 1.3.36-8 (John Meyendorff (ed.), *Grégoire Palamas. Défense des saints hésychastes,* 2nd rev. edn. (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense 30, Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1973), 189-93).

And when Symeon the New Theologian speaks of his hand, his foot, and even his male member as 'Christ', he is doing no more, argues Kallistos Ware, than following out to the end 'the logic of Irenaeus' teaching concerning paradise and Maximus' vision of the human person as microcosm and mediator'. [14]

[14] Kallistos Ware, ' "My Helper and My Enemy": The Body in Greek Christianity', in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 8, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 100.

But if Maximus is thought to contribute so unambiguously to the affirmation of the constitutive status and function of the material order in God's scheme of bringing the universe to perfection, what are we to make of his equally unambiguous ascetic austerity and esoteric mysticism in which, as von Balthasar expressed in an earlier, much less friendly study, 'he relapses in many respects into a Monophysite-tinged spiritualism'?[15] There can be no mistaking the severity of Maximus' purificatory programme in which he calls on his readers to 'subject the flesh to the spirit, mortifying and enslaving it by every sort of ill-treatment'.[16] In imitation of the psalmist's zeal for the holy city (LXX Ps. 100: 8), Maximus says that they too must become 'executioners (φονευτά) of the bodily

passions'.[17] The active contempt for all visible phenomena exercised by the true Christian gnostic must extend 'even [to] his own body'.[18] The monk should be on vigilant guard against the constant inducement by the passion of self-love 'to have mercy on his body' (ἐλεειν τὸ σωμα).[19] Do not these few examples of what Dom Polycarp Sherwood once referred to as 'excessive **end p.3** spiritualisation' [20]

[20] Polycarp Sherwood, 'Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus as Manifest in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 24 (1958), 207.

indicate an inconsistency regarding the claims made about Maximus, or worse, an inconsistency within the Confessor's own theological and spiritual vision? Are they not indicative of deep-seated sympathies with an intellectualist ascetico-theological tradition that in recent years has been dubbed as 'iconoclastic'? [21]

[21] Elizabeth A. Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies', *Church History* 59 (1990), 152-4.

THE 'SPIRITUAL' IMPULSE OF PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

Here we are touching on a fundamental tension that relates not only to St Maximus but to the entire Greek patristic and ascetical tradition. From at least the time of the Reformation, if not before, it has been the view of many in the West that the Fathers cannot be taken as unambiguous proponents of properly incarnational Christianity. Largely on account of their alleged Platonizing tendencies, the Fathers are often thought to operate too uncritically with a worldview that subverts the primacy of the external order established by the incarnation and so threatens the integrity of created, bodily life. In his lauded biography on St Thomas Aquinas, G. K. Chesterton praised Thomas for rescuing Catholicism from precisely these kind of spiritualizing forces which, in his words, had 'very much got the upper hand' through Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, and other 'Oriental' influences. [22]

[22] *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York and London: Image Books, Doubleday, 1956), 11.

Chesterton pointedly regarded 'the Greek element in Christian theology' as a tendency leading 'more and more' to 'a sort of dried up Platonism; a thing of diagrams and abstractions; to the last indeed noble abstractions, but not sufficiently touched by that great thing that is by definition almost the opposite of abstraction: Incarnation'. [23]

[23] *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 61.

It could of course be argued that Chesterton, while an accomplished journalist and popular philosopher, was no specialist in philosophical theology. But then no less devoted a student of the Fathers than von Balthasar, who was once described by Henri **end p.4** de Lubac as 'perhaps the most learned man of our time', [24]

[24] Henri de Lubac, *Un témoin dans l'Église: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Paradoxe et Mystère de l'Église* (Paris, 1967), 186, quoted by Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 14.

also spoke critically of what he saw as a tendency evident in the Greek Fathers especially that 'proceeds unambiguously away from the material to the spiritual'. In his view a dogma as basic to incarnational Christianity as the resurrection of the body, while 'formally confessed and maintained' by the Fathers, sits uneasily within a worldview in which the flesh occupies at best a liminal plane. 'Spiritualization', he summarized disapprovingly, 'presented in a thousand different colorations, is the basic tendency of the patristic epoch.' [25]

[25] Von Balthasar, 'The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves', 375.

These are serious charges, directed particularly at the Greek tradition. Are they accurate? And does the study of the history of doctrine allow us to conclude that properly orthodox Christianity should contain nothing of some kind of 'spiritualizing' impulse?

Some would say no. Indeed, it has plausibly been advanced that there is discernible throughout the Church's life—not simply in the early centuries—what has been called a 'tradition of inwardness', a fundamental intuition that it is inwardness that qualifies the external dimensions of Christianity, not the other way around. [26]

[26] Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: SPCK, 1984), 35-44.

Whether this is the kind of 'inwardness' we would want to ascribe to St Maximus and the Greek Fathers is another question. It may rather be the lingering legacy of the specifically Augustinian spiritual tradition. [27]

[27] See Andrew Louth, 'The Body in Western Catholic Christianity', in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, 116-19.

Still, we want at this stage to affirm the fact that in the writings of the great catholic doctors of the ancient Church and in those Christian spiritual and intellectual traditions whose springs run as deep, there appears an ordering—equally sensitive to the perils of both Docetism and dualism—in which the spiritual *does* have priority over the material, and arguably must do so, if theology and with it all reality is to avoid plunging into a permanently unstable, materialist chaos. What should be noted, however, is that the Fathers pose this priority not primarily in terms of a strict opposition between the spiritual and material **end p.5** per se, but in terms of an eschatologically oriented order (*taxis*) in which the external and material dimensions of the cosmos become charged with efficacious, performative potency precisely and exclusively in their subordinate relation to the 'internal', spiritual sphere. That this order is rooted not in a dualistic metaphysics but in the miracle of the incarnation is manifest from St Athanasius' well-known phrase indicating the salutary effect in the baptized of what has taken place in Christ: λογωθεί

ση τη σαρκ ο —their flesh has been 'rendered rational', or better, has become charged with the divine Word. [28]

[28] Ath. *Ar*. 3.33 (PG 26. 396a).

The New Testament and especially the Gospel and Epistles of St John make it clear that this qualified but nevertheless flesh-redeeming incarnationalism is a basic characteristic of early catholic thought. As Tertullian once put it, *caro salutis est cardo*: the flesh is pivotal for salvation. In their original context, these words testified to the effective priority of the corporeal over the spiritual in the Church's primary sacramental acts. The outward and bodily come first; the inward and spiritual come second. The salvation of the soul is impossible apart from external, bodily means. Tertullian went on:

The flesh is washed that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed that the soul may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the laying on of hands that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ that the soul may likewise fatten on its God. [29]

[29] Tert. *Res*. 8.2.6-8.3.12 (CCSL 2. 931).

Tertullian was not singular in pronouncing this dependence so sharply. For the Fathers who came after him, whether Latin or Greek, the priority held by the corporeal over the spiritual in the sacramental order was perceived to have its ground in the fact of the incarnation. Alexandrian christology in particular, which in the Third and Fourth

Ecumenical Councils was to achieve normative status for all catholic christendom, was marked by the soteriological principle found in Irenaeus,[30]

[30] Iren. *Haer*. 5.14.1 (SC 153. 182): 'If the flesh were not in a position to be saved, the Word of God would in no wise have become flesh.'

Origen,[31]

[31] Or. *Herac*. 35-7 (SC 67. 70): 'The whole human being would not have been saved had [the Saviour and Lord] not assumed the whole human being.'

and Athanasius,[32]

[32] Ath. *Ar*. 3.33 (PG 26. 393a): 'If the works of the Word's divinity had not taken place through the body, man would not have been deified.'

end p.6 but made famous in Gregory Nazianzen's anti-Apollinarian axiom: what is not assumed is not healed.[33]

[33] Greg.Naz. *Ep*. 101.32 (SC 208. 50).

In other words, 'that alone is redeemed which is taken by Christ in the Incarnation'.[34]

[34] Grillmeier i. 366.

This principle was perceived to extend to the material dust from which man was formed in Eden by God. In Christ's very flesh, since it is the body of God the eternal Word, is realized the saving recapitulation of all creation.

THE CONTEMPORARY RETRIEVAL OF CORPOREALITY

Today this distinctly incarnational character of Christian faith and life continues to be vigorously defended by adherents of the catholic tradition as somehow constitutive of Christianity. We have heard how Chesterton defined the entire philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas along these lines. For Thomas, as for orthodox Christianity in general, the human body is no 'negligible napkin'. To be a Christian is nothing less than to believe 'that deity or sanctity has attached to matter or entered the world of the senses'.[35]

[35] *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 17-22.

And in response to a resurgence of neo-gnostic trends in contemporary ecclesial life, we are noticing increasingly urgent moves afoot that seek in continuity with mainstream tradition to define and locate catholic Christianity by external, bodily means. 'Theologies of the body' abound, though only a few could be said to be self-consciously continuous with mainstream catholic thought. Worthy examples include studies inspired by the personalist and incarnational emphases in the body-theology of Pope John Paul II.[36]

[36] See Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, Mass.: Pope John Center, 1985).

In her book especially dedicated to the pontiff entitled *Toward a Theology of the Body*, the Franciscan Mary Timothy Prokes argues that 'the genuineness and the intrinsic meaning of Christ's embodiment touches each of the central tenets of faith'.[37]

[37] *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 63.

Concurring with Cipriano Vagaggini's claim that 'the physical body of Christ possesses a function *that is always active and permanent and even eternal*',[38]

[38] Ibid., 62, quoting Cipriano Vagaggini, *The Flesh Instrument of Salvation: A Theology of the Human Body* (Staten Island, NY: Society of St Paul, 1969), 16.

it follows that 'when the *corporeal* reality of Christ's life, death and resurrection is open to vague **end p.7** interpretations the basic meaning of Christianity disintegrates'.[39]

[39] *Toward a Theology of the Body,* 139.

Nor is this an agenda exclusive to the Roman communion. Was it not against the spiritualizing Schwärmer of his own day that Luther railed, 'God will not deal with us except by external means'? [40]

[40] Cf. Martin Luther, *Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament* (1525), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, xviii (Kritische Gesamtsausgabe, Weimar: Böhlau, 1908), 136: '… the outward elements should and must come first. And the inward things come afterwards and by means of the outward, for [God] has decided to give the inward element to no one except by means of the outward element. For he will give no one the Spirit or faith without the outward word and sign which he has instituted….'

Today too we are noticing not a few Protestants themselves issuing a call to return to externals, to reformulate the very definition of spiritual theology by resurrecting its visible, carnate roots. According to the Episcopalian Owen Thomas, such a renewal 'will involve an emphasis on the outer life as the major source of the inner life and, thus, a renewed stress on the body and communal and public life as well as a renewed focus on participation in the reign of God as the center of the Christian life, including a renewed emphasis on moral and liturgical practice in Christian formation'. [41]

[41] Owen C. Thomas, 'Interiority and Christian Spirituality', *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000), 60; see also George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 33-41; David S. Yeago, 'Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age', *Lutheran Forum* 34/4 (2000), 6-16.

If then it can be asserted that for catholic Christianity and the normative christological tradition the reality of God's external enfleshment in Christ determines an *ordo salutis* in which the very validity of the 'inner' spiritual quest rests on its dependent relation to external, bodily factors, then we must ask how St Maximus stands in relation to these norms. Thus our initial question, 'What happens to the body when it is deified?', becomes a tool of enquiry regarding the coherence and catholicity of Maximus' overall theological vision. Our answers to these questions will depend largely not only on the evidence we discover in Maximus' writings themselves, but also on the manner in which we approach that evidence and the hermeneutical tools we employ to interpret it. It is our purpose from here on in our Introduction to provide a brief prolegomenon that will help us situate Maximus' thought within its own historical, intellectual, and social horizon. Only with some of **end p.8** these basic presuppositions in place can we hope to deal fairly and intelligently with what he has to say about the material order, and so offer any judgement with respect to the claims made about him and the traditions he so conscientiously struggled to embody.

MONASTICISM, THE BODY, AND THE NEOPLATONIC VISION OF THE COSMOS

The tension we have unearthed between the fundamental affirmation of the body and the material order on the one hand and the ascetical programme in which the body is subjected to objectification and systematic marginalization on the other deserves closer, more nuanced analysis. At the heart of this tension lies the question of the status of material and temporal reality—cosmic and bodily. Throughout the patristic era the incarnation, or more specifically, 'the *logos* of the cross', retained its character as 'folly to Greeks' (1 Cor. 1: 18-23). While for faith the incarnation was a *datum*, for the mind it remained a problem. It was within this tension that, six centuries after St Paul, Maximus the Confessor himself lived and wrote. Yet as it was for the Apostle so it was for the

Confessor a fruitful, productive tension. For we must not overlook the profoundly *physical* character of the backdrop to Maximus' spiritual-intellectual pursuits. Monasticism was not only nor even primarily a negative movement. Even the early eremitic movements of the fourth century were as much about embracing a certain social and spiritual reality as they were about rejecting the false conditions imposed by political and worldly existence. The monks could commit themselves to a life of spiritual and bodily struggle and impose severe limitations upon their bodies, not because they held any kind of gnostic contempt for materiality as such, but, as Peter Brown observes, 'because they were convinced that they could sweep the body into a desperate venture.…[The] transfiguration of the few great ascetics, on earth, spoke to them of the eventual transfiguration of their own bodies on the day of the Resurrection.' [42]

[42] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 222.

Indeed, through ascesis the body was made an instrumental player and crucial participator in human redemption—in Brown's words, 'the discreet mentor of the proud soul'. [43]

[43] *Body and Society*, 237.

'Seldom, in ancient thought', he remarks, **end p.9** had the body been seen as more deeply implicated in the transformation of the soul; and never was it made to bear so heavy a burden. For the Desert Fathers, the body was not an irrelevant part of the human person, that could, as it were, be 'put in brackets.'… It was, rather, grippingly present to the monk: he was to speak of it as 'this body, that God has afforded me, as a field to cultivate, where I might work and become rich.' [44]

[44] *Body and Society*, 236.

Monasticism propelled its practitioners into an existence with a sharply eschatological and prophetic orientation in which the whole person—soul and body—was urged towards a perfection only fully realized in another realm. Yet for a rare few this transfigured, perfect state had already been realized here on earth. [45]

[45] Kallistos Ware documents both ancient and contemporary testimonies of bodily transfiguration in 'The Transfiguration of the Body', in A. M. Allchin (ed.), *Sacrament and Image: Essays in the Christian Understanding of Man* (London: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1967), 17-32.

In direct continuity with the monastic culture of the desert, Maximus looked to the great saints of the past—Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the Apostles—as prototypical monks who had experienced this transfiguration 'while still in the flesh'. [46]

[46] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1124b).

For the person who through divine grace and personal effort becomes 'another Abraham' or 'another Moses' there is effective in the soul *and the body* the deifying presence of God. Such a person has become, in the words of one of the first Christian Platonists, 'God going about in the flesh'. [47]

[47] Clem. *Str*. 7.16.101 (SC 428. 304).

In adopting this generally positive stance towards the body and material life, Christian monasticism was not an isolated current. Highlighting the continuity of Christian thought with its late antique cultural context, von Balthasar cast the ancient philosophy of the Greek world in the mould of a 'theological aesthetic'. [48]

[48] *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, iv. *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Brian McNeil *et al*., ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 323.

Neoplatonist and Christian stood side by side when they maintained in contemplating the visible world that, for all its inherent vulnerability and transience, it was 'the epiphany of divine glory'. [49]

[49] Ibid., 323. Gerhart B. Ladner also refers to the common 'experience of a world pervaded by the divine' in *God, Cosmos, and Humankind: The World of Early Christian Symbolism*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 2.

Both **end p.10** recognized in creation a mysterious, divine quality that precluded any kind of simple, outright rejection of material reality as evil. It should come as no surprise, then, that there emerged throughout the course of late antiquity strong and certain relations between Christian and pagan Neoplatonic accounts of the metaphysical structure of reality. For it was precisely that which the intellectual traditions of classical culture valued as vital and lasting and real that contributed to the Church's ability to forge solid intellectual and philosophical foundations for its lived experience of faith—a faith that sees the cosmos as the arena of divine salvation. [50]

[50] See Vogel, 'Platonism and Christianity', 1-62; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*: *The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

From a purely historical perspective, Plato's *Timaeus* served as vital a role as Moses' Genesis and Solomon's Wisdom in the development and reception of the Christian doctrine of creation. Indeed many of the greatest Christian thinkers, much to the chagrin of anti-Christian polemicists like Celsus, Julian, and Porphyry, understood the Christian faith as somehow completing or perfecting the wisdom of the philosophers. Origen's magisterial apology against Celsus often involves the Alexandrian catechist in a playful championing of Plato against the would-be Platonist. [51]

[51] Or. *Cels*. 4.62 (SC 136. 338-40); 7.42-3 (SC 150. 110-16).

Yet the nearly universal Christian self-adaptation to Greek culture was by no means indiscriminate. Throughout the Church's early life there can be witnessed a broad range of responses towards non-Christian philosophy, ranging from far-going acceptance to outright hostility. Nor was this critical tension confined to the pre-Constantinian era. In the sixth and seventh centuries, when there occurred a dramatic decline in classical education lasting about three centuries, [52]

[52] Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold, 1933), 225-7; Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity ad 150-750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 172-87.

there can be observed a noticeable discomfort felt by certain Christian groups—particularly by monastic communities in Syria and Palestine—towards any kind of proximity between Christian doctrine and non-Christian ('Hellenic') intellectual culture and categories of thought. [53]

[53] See Cyril Mango's comments in John Meyendorff, 'Byzantium as Center of Theological Thought in the Christian East', in Patrick Henry (ed.), *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 66.

In the **end p.11** mind of many orthodox monks and bishops, there *were* limits to the intellectual and conceptual affinities between Christian and non-Christian thought. Such sentiments were by no means confined to the Greek east. In the famous utterance of St Augustine, the Platonists indeed taught that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God', but they said nothing about the fact that this Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us'. [54]

[54] Aug. *Conf.* 7.9.13 (CCSL 27. 101).

Plato's eternity of the soul; Aristotle's necessity of being; the Stoics' dissolution and rebirth of all things: each involved assumptions and included implications at no uncertain

odds with data reaching back to a tradition predating Plato or Socrates, yet relatively 'new' in form in the kerygma of the Church: a creation out of nothing; a God made flesh; a resurrected body. [55]

[55] Georges Florovsky, 'Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introduction', *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), 235-50.

We may add to this background commentary a further, negative witness to the fact that any sweeping appraisal of Greek Christianity as spiritualistic is less than accurate. According to Adolf von Harnack, the Greek Fathers' readiness to think within the terms and framework provided by classical culture indicates that the original evangelical kerygma had become corrupted and an intellectualist system of natural religion established in its stead. [56]

[56] Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1957), 210-45.

Interestingly, however, Harnack's criticisms bear witness not to spiritualizing tendencies but to the overtly materialistic character of the Byzantine cult. With reference to what he calls 'Greek Catholicism' for example he writes:

In its external form as a whole this Church is nothing more than a continuation of the history of Greek religion under the alien influence of Christianity, parallel to the many other alien influences which have affected it.…

[T]his official ecclesiasticism with its priests and its cult, with all its vessels, saints, vestments, pictures and amulets, with its ordinances of fasting and its festivals, has absolutely nothing to do with the religion of Christ. [57]

[57] *What is Christianity?*, 221, 241.

end p.12

It is in a similar though more popular vein that Aldous Huxley has suspected the whole tradition of sacramental Christianity of 'an idolatrous preoccupation with events and things in time—events and things regarded not merely as useful means, but as ends, intrinsically sacred and indeed divine'. [58]

[58] *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 63.

Much later, in the medieval west, this overt and formal materialism may have served to exacerbate the tension between the sacramental/practical and spiritual/intellectual aspects of Christianity. But in Maximus' time, at least, no such rift had yet occurred.

MAXIMUS' LIVING PRAXIS

These are the broader parameters of Maximus' religious world, a world in which the material, corporeal, and external, far from suffering outright marginalization, are accorded constitutive, almost sacramental value. All these factors constitute the 'living *praxis*' [59]

[59] Pierre Hadot, quoted in the introduction to his *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. and ed. Arnold I. Davidson and Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 19.

from which the Confessor's philosophical theology emerged, and apart from which we risk uprooting the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of his theological vision from the native soil that forms their interpretive context. To this broader picture a number of details may be added. We know, first of all, that Maximus was himself somewhat small in stature and, perhaps typically for a saint, frail in body. [60]

[60] *Hypom*. 86-7 (CCSG 39. 203)

His life, much more than ours, would have been affected by the fragile variabilities of day and night, cold and heat, seasons and harvest, war and peace. How much more then would the steady rhythms of the monastic *ordo*—fasting, feasts, vigils, almsgiving, psalmody, prayer, *lectio divina*—have penetrated and transformed and given stability to his existential experience of vulnerability, transience, and flux. [61]

[61] For a reconstruction of details in the (earlier) monastic office in the east, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (Alcuin Club Collections 63, London: SPCK, 1981), 93-110.

For all his heady profundity, here is a man immersed in the earthy conditions of monastic life with its ascetic discipline, social obligations, sacramental rites, veneration of icons and the 'holy flesh' of departed saints, hierarchical ecclesiastical government, not **end p.13** to mention its intricate and intriguing connections with the often violent world of international politics.

Turning to evaluate Maximus' writings as a whole, we notice that they are predominantly occasional, written not to lay down a speculative, systematic vision but prepared on demand, such that 'it is the rhythm of spiritual life rather than a logical connection of ideas which defines the architectonics of his vision of the world…'. [62]

[62] Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ix. *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 213.

His works therefore exhibit those literary forms whose roots lie deep in monastic sapiential, pedagogical, and exegetical tradition: questions and responses, chapters, scriptural and liturgical commentary, letters and, later, when the need demanded, polemical dogmatic treatises. These forms do not dictate his thought, but are woven together with pedagogical, pastoral, and dogmatic concerns within a heuristic approach that never loses sight of its pragmatic purpose. [63]

[63] This fact is demonstrated in Paul M. Blowers' outstanding thesis, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the* Quaestiones ad Thalassium (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 7, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

Considered against the broader background we have sketched, these few details suggest that however high the level of intellectual speculation Maximus attained, however great his estimation of intelligible over sensible reality, both his feet, like Socrates', were firmly planted on the ground. [64]

[64] *Phaedo* 61d.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

By now it should be agreed that we have the subject matter for an interesting and potentially fruitful study. One or two final remarks on procedure are in order. Our theme provides us with the advantage of being a unique and relatively accessible angle of approach to Maximus' frequently impenetrable theological mind. As such it functions as a practical introduction to his theology. While the human body has formed the focus of other, more narrowly anthropological studies in Scripture, [65]

[65] John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

Paul, [66]

[66] J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1952); Ernst Käsemann, 'On Paul's Anthropology', in id., *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1-31.

Athanasius **end p.14** , [67] Gregory of Nyssa, [68]

[68] Reinhard M. Hübner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der 'Physischen' Erlösungslehre* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

the Greek Christian tradition, [69]

[69] Kallistos Ware, ' "My Helper and My Enemy": The Body in Greek Christianity', in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, 90-110.

the Latin Christian tradition, [70]

[70] C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

and early Christian theology in general, [71]

[71] Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

and while the theme of deification has been the subject of an encyclopedic monograph by Jean-Claude Larchet, [72]

[72] *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996).

never has the deification of the body been the focus of a single study in Maximian scholarship, still less the catalyst for a wider consideration of the epistemological, ontological, christological, liturgical, and ascetical significance of corporeality and the material order in Maximus' overall theological vision. Primarily to avoid introducing issues extrinsic to Maximus' immediate range of thought, I have deliberately omitted discussion of contemporary questions raised about the body in social anthropology and gender studies. What I offer is, nevertheless, at one and the same time a philologically disciplined, technical study in historical theology and a spiritual-theological apology, on the one hand offering detailed contextual and material analysis of relevant texts and the structure of Maximus' thought, and on the other appealing to the abiding import—spiritual and intellectual—of the Greek patristic tradition as mediated via one of its most erudite exponents.

Due simply to the overall coherence of Maximus' thought—his ability to contain the whole of his immense vision within each of its parts—the five chapters in which this book is arranged function as mere windows through which we shall attempt to view discrete themes that he would have considered inseparable from one another. What holds them together will hopefully become most apparent in our chapter on 'Corporeality and Christ' which, standing at the centre of the entire study, occupies a symbolic place that may well have pleased the Confessor himself. For it is Christ who, in all his bodily glory, stands as the unifying centre of all **end p.15** Maximus' own thought. Indeed, Maximus did not simply think about Christ, but referring all he experienced and knew to him, regarded him as his very life, in whom he hoped to participate body and soul in the reality of the blessings to come, and whom alone he acknowledged together with the Father and the Holy Spirit to be glorified by all creation. [73]

[73] *Or. dom*. 829-34 (CCSG 23. 73).end p.16

1 Corporeality and Concealment

A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy. [1]

[1] George Herbert, *The Elixir*, lines 9-12, in John N. Wall (ed.), *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple* (Classics of Western Spirituality, New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 311.

Towards the evening of his philosophical and literary career, Plato made a statement in his *Timaeus* that for many centuries after him came increasingly to possess the force of an epistemological axiom: 'To discover the maker and father of this universe is indeed a hard task, and having found him it would be impossible to tell everyone about him.' [2]

[2] *Timaeus* 28c.

Later generations of philosophers found encapsulated in these words two vital principles. The first was the fact of God's virtual inaccessibility to human modes of rational enquiry. The second was the inadequacy of human modes of discourse to express knowledge of God—should such knowledge become available. The problem these two principles present for the 'lover of wisdom' is not simply one of communication. It is rather one of communion. To know God is not to know about him but to be united to him, and to be united to him one must be like him. But God is infinite, while humans are evidently finite. God is immortal; humans are mortal. God is spirit: simple and incorporeal; humans are corporeal composites: rational souls mingled with the dust of the earth. God is impassible; humans are subject to all kinds of impulses from without and within. The pursuit of union with God presupposes that the yawning gulf between knower and known can be bridged. But can it? **end p.17**

In this opening chapter we shall explore further the implications this epistemological problem poses with respect to the status and function of the material universe and, more specifically, the status and function of the human body. To put it quite simply: does matter get in the way of seeing God? It has often been thought that in Platonist philosophies, material reality, on account of its inherent plurality, possesses at best an ambivalent status in the human quest to know God. Yet in the vision of St Maximus the Confessor—whose theology definitely exhibits affinities with Platonic exemplarism [3]

[3] See Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor: A Study of His Metaphysical Principles* (Oslo: University of Oslo, Department of Philosophy, 1999), 24-59.

—the whole intelligible-sensible universe presents itself as a real medium for the self-manifestation of God without being coextensive with his being. Behind this understanding of cosmic theophany we recognize several sources: at a distance, Plato's *Timaeus*—enhanced in Neoplatonism by further reflection on the idea of a divine world-soul which pervades and supports the universe. More immediately to hand we detect the cosmic vision of Dionysius the Areopagite. As an idea present in ancient sapiential literature of both the Oriental and Hellenic worlds, we also find it expressed for instance in Wisdom 13: 1-9 and later explicitly echoed in Romans 1: 20 where St Paul claims, 'for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine majesty—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made…'. The whole universe, in the words of the psalmist, can properly be said to 'declare the glory of God'. [4]

[4] Psalm 18: 2. All Old Testament references follow the numbering in LXX. Maximus introduces this verse in an exposition of Romans 1: 20 in *Q.Thal*. 13.1-41 (CCSG 7. 95-7).

Ultimately, however, central to Maximus' foundation for such a steadfast conviction is the person of Christ Jesus, the Son of God made flesh. In Christ, God the Word has fulfilled in a definitive yet hidden way his will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment'. [5]

[5] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1084d).

Whether God's revelation in Christ simply parallels what happens in creation—albeit at a quantitatively greater or even qualitatively different level—or in fact constitutes or fulfils it, is a question we shall need to pursue in due course. But if the interpretation of created reality depends on a fact somehow prior to or beyond it, then the appearance of the transcendent **end p.18** principle in the world of created reality supplies the very key to making sense of that reality. For now we can affirm that for Maximus what can be known and said of God has itself been given by God who presents himself for apprehension in the symbolic structures of his pluriform incarnate economies.

At the same time, Maximus, like his orthodox predecessors, is under no illusions about the fundamental ontological dissimilarity of this universe to God, and the inadequacy of rational discourse when it comes to speaking of divine matters. In himself, God so far transcends the created realm that there is nothing in it that approximates him or can serve as a fitting analogy by which to approach him. Moreover, on account of its inherent instability, material creation possesses a potentially deceptive character that blinds the unenlightened observer to its true nature—that is, its true purpose. Creation therefore not only reveals God. It also hides or conceals him. Whatever one can predicate of God by way of analogy and affirmation—whether intelligence or goodness or being itself—is in fact more accurately denied of him. So we shall find Maximus speaking in a way anticipated by Clement, Origen, and the Cappadocian Fathers and shared by Dionysius the Areopagite of a 'double' way of doing theology. It is the paradoxical, dialectical way of affirmation (*kataphasis*) and negation (*apophasis*); paradoxical, because it is by affirmation that God is concealed, and by negation that he is revealed; dialectical, because the Christian life involves a continual movement between the two.

What then are we to make of the sensible world, and what are we to do with our own human senses? While the answers to these questions will only become more patent towards the end of our whole study, we shall at least offer some preliminary observations within the bounds of this first chapter. For a start, it may be wiser to ask what God makes of the sensible world. For Maximus, the shifting, diffuse tendencies of the material universe serve God's providential and pedagogical economies whereby he condescends to human weakness and leads the human soul via sensible symbols to penetrate through to the intelligible realities that lie hidden beneath and beyond—beyond, that is, in the eschatological sense. The sensible realm must be transcended. Maximus repeats this with relentless resolve throughout his ascetic writings. In itself it is not evil, for everything God has created is good. But to stop short with it is idolatry: it is to 'worship and serve created things rather **end p.19** than the creator' (Rom. 1: 25). Precisely in rising upon it as on a ladder, one is able to reclaim it, to reorder it, to recognize its true God-given purpose and worth as an arena for the display of ineffable divine glory. [6]

[6] This has been articulated in our own time by C. S. Lewis in his preface to *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (London: Collins, 1946), 7-9.

Consequently the spiritual life is a constant *diabasis*—a 'passage' from the sensible to the intelligible, from the flesh to the Spirit, from the active life to the contemplative, from earthly to heavenly, from temporal to eternal. Christian ascesis involves the elimination

from the soul of carnal and idolatrous attachments, the reordering of our sensible, emotional, and rational faculties, and the orientation of the whole person—body, soul, and mind—to God. To characterize the dualism implied by the categories mentioned such as flesh/spirit and sensible/intelligible as E. R. Dodds once incredibly did, as 'an endogenous neurosis, an index of intense and widespread guilt-feelings', [7]

[7] So E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35-6.

would be to fail to understand not only the eschatological anthropology of St Paul, but the spiritual impulse of the entire catholic patristic tradition. The dualism proposed in the tradition Maximus receives, lives, and hands on is the dualism of Adam and Christ, the dualism of the outer man and the inner, the earthly man and the heavenly, the dualism of the mortal body and the immortal body, the dualism of 'now' and 'not yet'. [8]

[8] 1 Cor. 15: 35-57; 2 Cor. 4: 16-5: 10.

It is the dualism of the baptismal, deified life, in which one is given to concur with both St Maximus and the Apostle, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God' (Gal. 2: 20).

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION: THE TWO MODES OF THEOLOGY

For the Fathers of the Church, Plato's words cited at the start of this chapter only echoed Moses' and the prophets' confession of God's transcendence over against all creation. St Paul too, faced with the insurmountable mystery of God's inscrutable acts of judgement and salvation with Israel, was led to praise him in doxology inspired by the prophet Isaiah:**end p.20**

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.
(Rom. 11: 33-6)

If anything, in the Fathers' view, Plato had not gone far enough in asserting the inaccessibility, incomprehensibility, and utter independence of the divine nature. Origen's treatment of the passage in the *Timaeus* in his response to the pagan critic of Christianity, Celsus, is well-known. [9]

[9] Or. *Cels*. 7.36-45 (SC 150. 94-122).

Origen's epistemology deserves closer attention since it represents a very early working out of concerns that were to remain primary in the mainstream intellectual, exegetical, and ascetic traditions of the Church of the Fathers. According to Henri Crouzel, the starting point of knowledge in Origen is the symbol. [10]

[10] 'The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', in Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer (eds.), *History of Theology*, i. *The Patristic Period,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 162.

As the embodiment of the (divine) mystery they express, symbols bridge the gap between subject and object and bring about a participation of one in the other. [11]

[11] Crouzel, 'The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', 162-4.

Origen's discussion of the *Timaeus* passage cited by Celsus provides a useful example of some of the main points in his thought. He explains how Celsus had falsely characterized Christians as seeking to know God through sensual perception alone. Celsus, apparently disgusted at what he considered to be Christianity's gross materialism and preoccupation with carnal things, argued that if Jesus' followers truly wanted to be able to see God, they should close the eyes of their flesh and open instead those of the soul. It is in this context that Celsus had marshalled Plato's dictum about how difficult it is to discover God, and having done so, how impossible it is to make him known to all. Knowledge of God, in Celsus' book, is evidently an enterprise for an intellectual elite, far beyond the powers of the mundane masses.

Origen refutes his opponent on several scores. Celsus is of course wrong if he regards Christians as materialists, for, having come to learn of the invisible and incorporeal God, their life and purity of

end p.21 worship bear ample witness to their willingness to mortify the flesh and do away with the carnal rites of idol worship. He is wrong too, to think that Christians do not acknowledge the limitations of sensible means of apprehension. Citing Romans 1: 20, Origen affirms that 'though earthly human beings must begin by applying their senses to sensible objects in order to ascend (ἀναβαίνειν) from them to a knowledge of the nature of intelligible realities, yet their knowledge must not stop short with objects of sense'. [12]

[12] Or. *Cels*. 7.37 (SC 150. 100). The 'intelligible realities' are in Origen a subtle assimilation of the Platonic ideas to prophetic, eschatological realities. Ultimate reality, for him, equates to 'the inheritance of the eternal life to come' (Or. *Lev*. 5.1.24-5 (SC 286. 206)).

Thus, while Christians do *not* claim that it is impossible to know intelligible realities apart from sense, they might well ask who *is* able to know them apart from sense. On yet another point, Origen wryly points out Christianity's familiarity with the Greeks' idea of two kinds of vision, one bodily and the other intellectual. It is an idea borrowed from Moses and used by the Saviour who says, 'For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see might see, and that those who see might be blinded' (John 9: 39).

Arriving at last at Celsus' appeal to Plato, Origen decries Celsus' inability to come to terms adequately with both the transcendence of God and his benevolence. Here Origen drives home three main points. First, in contrast to Plato's disregard for the lowly populace, the revelation of God in the Word made flesh is a universal revelation, potentially accessible to all. Secondly, Plato's language implies (wrongly) that while knowledge of God is indeed difficult to attain, it is still not beyond natural human powers. But 'we maintain', counters Origen, 'that human nature is in no way able to seek after God, or to attain a pure knowledge of him without the help of him whom it seeks'. [13]

[13] Or. *Cels*. 7.42.28-31 (SC 150. 114).

Thirdly, Celsus' application of the name 'the unspeakable' to God disregards Plato's implicit acknowledgement that, while it is impossible to make God known to all, he can be made known to some. This last argument appears somewhat disingenuous until we learn that by it Origen is seeking to uphold an even stricter theological principle and at the same time to introduce a christological one. God the Father is indeed 'unspeakable', as are many other beings inferior to him. Yet it is possible to 'see' him on the basis of his own revelation in the Logos. 'He who has seen me', says Jesus, 'has seen the Father'

end p.22 (John 14: 9). To know God is to see him, a possibility opened up to the pure in heart by the gracious incarnation of the Word, the only-begotten Son, the visible image of the invisible God. [14]

[14] Crouzel notes also the connection Origen makes between knowledge and image ('The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', 161). Maintaining the rule that only like knows like, 'the pure in heart' are the *logikoi* who, having recovered by the Spirit the purity of the soul made according to the image of God, are capable of assimilation to the image of God itself, the *Logos*.

Origen's primary goal in all this is to show that Celsus' and even Plato's arguments finally rest on nothing more than 'philosophical agnosticism'. [15]

[15] Robert L. Wilken, 'No Other Gods', in id., *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 55.

Their claims to know God were clearly false, for such knowledge had failed to become manifest in their worship and piety: they still treated man-made idols and creatures as God. True knowledge of God begins not with human reasoning, but with God, and with what he has presented of himself to be seen. [16]

[16] Wilken, 'No Other Gods', 55-6.

From there it leads to the transformation of one's life, to the ascent from sensible phenomena to intelligible realities, and from there to union with the simple, incorporeal, invisible God. As Origen concludes,

The disciples of Jesus regard these phenomenal things only that they may use them as steps to ascend to a level where they can perceive the nature of intelligible realities…. And once they have risen from the created things of this world to 'the invisible things of God' (Rom. 1: 20), they do not stay there; but after they have sufficiently exercised their minds upon these, and have understood their nature, they ascend to 'the eternal power of God' (Rom. 1: 20): in a word, to his divinity. [17]

[17] Or. *Cels*. 7.46.34-42 (SC 150. 124-6).

Throughout Origen's argument we are able to detect themes constantly reiterated in the Fathers, and especially the affirmation that the proper way to acknowledge God's incomprehensibility is not with rational conjecture, nor yet with agnostic scepticism, but with 'silence'—a transfigured life issuing in humble and holy reverence and praise. Divine revelation is not a bare demonstration from the divine side, but a dialectical engagement, a transformative process that starts and ends in God—or more precisely, in God the Father. [18]

[18] Herein lies the classic trinitarian structure of epistemology adumbrated by Origen (Or. *Princ*. 1.3.4-8 (SC 252. 149-65); Or. *Joh*. 19.6.33-8 (SC 290. 66-70)) and later enunciated by Basil of Caesarea (Bas. *Spir*. (PG 32. 153b)). See Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Hermeneutics and Soteriology in Origen's *Peri Archon*', *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), 338-9; Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 20-1; Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 15-17.

It is not difficult to see how advocates of this recognizably **end p.23** trinitarian structure of revelation and illumination could adapt Neoplatonist categories such as procession and return, descent and ascent, diffusion and union, all of which imply a descent from simple unity towards material multiplicity and an ascent back to immaterial union with the One. At the outermost extension of the movement lie sensible, corporeal phenomena. Knowledge of God is impossible without the corporeal realm. [19]

[19] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 28.12.25-31 (SC 250. 126). The question about the role of the sensible in epistemology and revelation remained alive and well into the seventh and eighth centuries in connection with the iconoclastic controversy. See Averil Cameron, 'The Language of Images: The Rise of Icons and Christian Representation', in Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and the Arts* (Studies in Church History 28, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 1-42.

Maximus too is concerned with the transformative character and doxological goal of the apophatic way to union with God. As he seems keen to demonstrate in his *Chapters on Theology and the Economy*,[20]

[20] PG 90. 1084-1173. Hereafter called *Chapters on Theology* and abbreviated *Th.Oec*.

all true spiritual progress necessarily begins with an epistemological crisis. Human reason stands before God speechless, for in himself he is beyond all knowing and speculation. While we may learn by analogy from created being *that* God is (τὸ εἶναι), creation itself says nothing about *how* (πῶς εἶναι) or *what* (τὸ τί εἶναι) he is.[21]

[21] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1133c, 1180d).

He is neither subject nor object, he neither thinks nor is thought, for these are categories that necessarily involve relating to some extrinsic entity. God, however, is utterly independent and perfectly self-contained.[22]

[22] *Th.Oec*. 2.2 (PG 90. 1125c).

This epistemological impasse—itself the existential correlate of an ontological fact—is a fundamental theological presupposition throughout Maximus' thought. Arising as it does in the distinct unit formed by the opening ten paragraphs of the *Chapters on Theology* (1.1-10), it confronts the would-be contemplative with startling force. In the light of the fact that the century form of the *Chapters on Theology*, in which is collated a broad collection of highly condensed spiritual axioms, is especially designed for easy retention and performative application in the monastic **end p.24** life,[23]

[23] Von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 482-4.

such deliberate placement invites our closer scrutiny. George Berthold has drawn attention to the almost credal form of these chapters,[24]

[24] 'The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus the Confessor', in Felix Heinzer and Christoph von Schönborn (eds.), *Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur. Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980* (Fribourg, Éditions Universitaires: 1982), 55.

a form mirrored in the opening paragraph of the second century of chapters as well:

God is one, because there is one divinity; monad, without beginning, simple and beyond being, without parts and undivided; the same is monad and triad, entirely monad, and entirely triad; wholly monad in essence, wholly triad in *hypostases*.[25]

[25] *Th.Oec*. 2.1 (PG 90. 1124d-1125a).

The conspicuous presence of the alpha privative—the prefix of negation—throughout this passage and its parallel credal set in the unit formed by 1.1-10 confirms their strongly apophatic character. But we also notice that these negations are couched in the form of a positive confession. And at the end of 1.1-10, strangely enough, the negations give way to quite a clear affirmation, or at least, an affirmation interwoven with the doxological utterance we heard earlier from St Paul in Romans 11: 36:

God is the beginning, middle, and end of beings as one who brings them about, but not as one who suffers them, as is the case with us. For he is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as circumference, 'for', as it says, 'from him and through him and to him are all things'.

Has Maximus here abandoned the primacy of the *via negativa*? Is it in fact possible to say something of the God of whom nothing properly can even be denied, let alone affirmed? Let us remember that by this time, the negative theology articulated by Origen had undergone a noticeable metamorphosis. Before him, Clement of Alexandria—in his own engagement with Plato's *Timaeus* dictum—had drawn together central biblical motifs demonstrating God's ultimate inaccessibility: Moses' entry into the darkness of God's

dwelling place on Sinai; St Paul's exclamation from Romans 11: 33 on the depths of divine *sophia* and *gnosis*; and the possibility of knowing the invisible Father only through the only-begotten Word and Son. [26]

[26] Clem. *Str*. 5.12.78-82 (SC 276. 152-60).

After him, and faced with the bold and blasphemous claims of the Eunomians to be able to describe

end p.25 accurately the true nature of God's essential being (οὐσία), all three Cappadocians had exercised more urgently both Alexandrians' inclination towards theological apophaticism. [27]

[27] See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 40-56.

St Gregory Nazianzen's rebuttal of Plato's dictum was even more acute than Origen's. Gregory agreed with the Athenian on the impossibility of expressing God, but argued for the even greater impossibility of perceiving him. [28]

[28] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 28.4.1-6 (SC 250. 106-8).

Commenting on a passage further on in Gregory's same sermon, Maximus himself states how the great Cappadocian doctor elected throughout his teaching 'to speak about God by privations and negations' in order to preclude any heretical presumption. [29]

[29] *Amb.Io*. 17 (PG 91. 1224bc).

In St Gregory of Nyssa's mysticism of darkness we are provided with a further example of a rigorous apophaticism at work in the spiritual life modelled on Moses' ascent into the

'gloom' or darkness (ϵἰ τὸν γνόφον) on Mount Sinai's hidden summit:

For leaving behind all visible realities, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intellect thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until, by the intellect's yearning for understanding, it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. [30]

[30] Greg.Nyss. *V.Mos*. 2.163 (SC 1. 81).

This darkness on Gregory's Mount Sinai, says Jean Daniélou, 'is the radical transcendence of God with respect to all nature and all possibility of intelligibility'. **[31]**

Here even the intellect (νου) becomes blind as a new kind of seeing emerges that is by faith.

In the fifth century, this apophaticism became even more strongly accentuated by Dionysius the Areopagite in a powerful crescendo. Dionysius is unequivocal in expressing the fact that God not only transcends our affirmations, but that he far exceeds our negations as well. [32]

[32] *De myst.theol*. 1.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 143.5-7).

With a liturgico-biblical emphasis reminiscent of Henry Vaughan's line, 'There is in God (some say) | A deep, but dazling darkness', Dionysius refers to the divine **end p.26**

darkness (ὁ θεῖος γνόφος) as the 'unapproachable light' (1 Tim. 6: 16) where 'God is said [by holy Scripture] to dwell'. [33]

[33] *Ep*. 5 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 162.3-4).

Elsewhere in a specifically liturgical context**[34]** he speaks of an immersion into 'the darkness beyond intellect'. [35]

[35] …ϵἰ τὸν ὑπὲρ νοῦν…γνόφον. *De myst.theol*. 3 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 147.9).

More generally, 'to know God' is to know that he is *beyond* all that can be known or perceived. According to Dionysius, this is precisely what St Paul meant in Romans 11: 33.[36]

[36] *Ep*. 5 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 162.11-163.2).

And in his famous first *Letter* he writes:

His transcendent darkness (τὸ ὑπερκείμενον αὐτοῦ σκότο)[37]

[37] H.-C. Puech suggests that γνόφο and σκότο in Dionysius bear two reciprocally related meanings. The former signifies the subjective ignorance of the knowing subject; the latter signifies the objective inaccessibility of God. See his 'La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique', *Études Carmelitaines* 23 (1938), 36.

remains hidden from all light and concealed from all knowledge. Someone who has beheld God and understood what he saw has not actually seen God himself but rather something belonging to God that has being and is knowable. For God himself utterly transcends mind and being. He is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and is known beyond intellect.[38]

[38] *Ep*. 1 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 156.7-157.5).

There is something here *in nuce* of the later Palamite distinction between God's essence and energies. In his essence, God is altogether transcendent and inaccessible. What may be known of him is τι τῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὄντων καὶ γινωσκομένων, something belonging to that participatable dimension of God which Maximus will define as ὅσα περὶ αὐτὸν οὐ σιωδῶ θεωρεῖται.[39]

[39] *Th.Oec*. 1.48 (PG 90. 1100d).

Maximus' pedagogical strategy in the *Chapters on Theology* betrays a close acquaintance with this entire apophatic tradition in both its theological and liturgico-mystical forms—the former most thoroughly worked out by Gregory Nazianzen, the latter having deeply Platonic roots and universally realized in the lived spiritual experience of darkness, deprivation, and unknowing in the presence of God.[40]

[40] Daniélou (*Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 191) traces this tradition back to Philo. Referring to the whole Greek philosophical tradition Hadot proposes that 'it is mystical experience that founds negative theology, not the reverse'. Quoted by Arnold I. Davidson in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 29. For further references indicating the terminological correspondences between the apophatic expressions in Maximus, Dionysius, and Gregory of Nyssa, see Walther Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), 336-42.

But contained in this 'negative' theology is also an **end p.27** impulse towards affirmation in the form of praise. It is only *after* Moses has laid down his will and understanding 'outside' visible phenomena that he begins to adore God. Only after he has entered the darkness (ϵἰ τὸν γνόφον)—'the formless and immaterial place of knowledge'—does he 'remain, performing the most sacred rites'.[41]

[41] *Th.Oec*. 1.84 (PG 90. 1117c).

Following the pattern set by the Pauline exclamation in Romans 11, the experience of negation gives rise to a positive state of hidden nearness to God and mystical praise. As

Berthold puts it, 'the revelation of God as Trinity is one which both reduces the human mind to apophatic silence and calls it to a life of divine intimacy'. [42]

[42] 'The Cappadocian Roots', 58.

The answer then to our question posed earlier surely lies in pointing out that for Maximus the *via negativa* is not so much an intellectual theory as a necessary experience, indeed, the characteristic experience of the Christian life that leads the (un)knowing subject towards the μυστικὴ δοξολογία, the eschatological and theological [43]

[43] In the strict, trinitarian sense of the word.

culmination of the spiritual pilgrimage 'from strength to strength' and 'glory to glory'. [44]

[44] *Th.Oec*. 2.77-8 (PG 90. 1161a-c).

Only when he has fully *denied* the possibility of any natural means of access to God—sensible or intellectual—and actually brought about the sharp awareness of that fact in his readers, is Maximus able to introduce the possibility of faith which, as a divine gift—a seeing with the spiritual eye of the intellect, an actual experience of God—gains access to the unknowable God in a way that far transcends discursive knowledge. [45]

[45] By 'experience' here and elsewhere I have in mind Louis Bouyer's reference to the Fathers' emphasis upon the objective, actual aspect of experience rather than the modern preoccupation with its subjective, emotive dimensions. See his discussion in *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, trans. Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 278-87.

It is for us no different than it was for Moses, for whom this drawing near to the hidden God takes place 'by faith alone' (πίστει μόνῃ). [46]

[46] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1148d); cf. *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1188ab); *Amb.Th*. 5.175-6 (CCSG 48. 28); 5.230 (CCSG 48. 31).

end p.28

In another passage, this time in response to a query from the priest Thalassius, Maximus once again explicitly links the way of negation to this experiential (non-)knowledge of God. 'Knowledge of divine things', he begins, 'is double' (διττήν):

The first kind is relative, since it resides in reason and intellectual ideas alone and possesses no actual perception through experience of its object. Through this kind of knowledge we dispose ourselves in the present life. The second, properly true kind of knowledge that consists in actual experience alone—apart from reason or intellectual ideas—brings about by participation the complete perception of its object by grace. Through this kind of knowledge we receive that supernatural deification due in the future, a deification that is unceasingly effective. They say that the relative way of knowing by reason and intellectual ideas stirs up desire for actual knowledge by participation, whereas the effective kind of knowledge that brings about via participation the perception of the object of knowledge through experience is a deprivation (ἀφαιρετικήν) of the other way of knowing consisting in reason and intellectual ideas. [47]

[47] *Q.Thal*. 60.63-76 (CCSG 22. 77).

Again there can be no doubt about Maximus' clear debt to Dionysius, who exalts experiential knowledge of God over that which is 'learned'; [48]

[48] Dionysius in *De div.nom*. 2.9 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, i. 134.1-2) praises Hierotheus as one who οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα.

certainly there is no basis to speak of any dramatic departure from him. [49]

[49] While I largely concur with Ysabel de Andia's argument that Maximus posits a far more christocentric relation than Dionysius between negative and affirmative theology, I would argue that her contrasts are drawn rather too sharply. See her 'Transfiguration et Théologie Négative chez Maxime le Confesseur et Denys l'Aréopagite', in Ysabel de Andia (ed.), *Denys l'Aréopagite*

et sa Postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du Colloque International. Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 293-328. For a more balanced appraisal, see Janet Williams's three studies, 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite I', *Downside Review* 408 (1999), 157-72;'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite II', *Downside Review* 409 (1999), 235-50;'The Incarnational Apophasis of Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001), 631-5.

The Areopagite also speaks of a 'double' (διττὴν) tradition of 'the theologians' (that is, the divinely inspired writers of Scripture): 'the manifest and more evident', which employs philosophical argument and rational demonstration, and 'the ineffable and hidden', which, by more experiential and sacramental means, ushers the subject directly into the presence of God. Both, nevertheless, are 'inextricably entwined'. [50]

[50] *Ep*. 9 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 197.9-12). **end p.29**

The dialectic inherent in this approach finds expression in the Areopagite's symbolic theology, in which 'unlike' symbols in Scripture, such as rock or wind or fire, are said to be more fitting for God than 'like' symbols such as 'Word' or 'Mind' or 'Being', all of which falsely suggest a real correspondence between themselves and the God who is beyond being. [51]

[51] *De coel.hier*. 2.2-3 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 10.13-13.23). See also Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 87-90. Rorem observes that the movement from affirmations to negations is not sequential so much as logical. Affirmation and negation denote two ordered but contemporaneous epistemological approaches to a single reality.

This dialectic reaches further yet into the strong and ordered distinction which developed in the fourth century between *theologia*, knowledge of God in himself, and *economia*, knowledge of God as he engages with creation. Describing the dimension of *theologia*, Dionysius writes, 'Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also "unsearchable and inscrutable" (Rom. 11: 33), since there exists no trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity.' This is the apophatic way characterized by negation and deprivation of all rational and intellectual means of knowledge. But having said as much, Dionysius immediately goes on to speak of the kataphatic way, the way made possible by God's philanthropic, revelatory economy, the way which leads to mystical, experiential union with the triune God:

On the other hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it. What happens to those that rightly and properly make an effort is this: they do not venture towards an impossibly daring sight of God, one beyond what is duly granted them. Nor do they go tumbling downward where their own natural inclinations would take them. No. Instead they are raised firmly and unswervingly upward in the direction of the ray which enlightens them. With a love matching the illuminations granted them, they take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness. [52]

[52] *De div.nom*. 1.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, i. 110.11-111.2).

It is important to point out that Dionysius' rather abstract-sounding language here is actually aimed at substantiating a **end p.30** theological method that requires strict adherence to the boundaries of biblical revelation. To assert the primacy of the apophatic way does not imply the abandonment of revelation for the sake of some higher,

alternative, esoteric *gnosis*. Dionysius is no 'mystical iconoclast', as von Balthasar so rightly perceived.[53]

[53] Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ii. *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984), 179.

Rather this paragraph directs us to conceive of revelation as an interactive dialectic that heads towards the reunification of both divine and human subjects. Inherent to this dialectic is the paradoxical nature of revelation. God reveals himself by hiding himself, and in hiding himself, makes himself known. In this sense, we can never speak of revelation without also speaking of concealment.[54]

[54] See Maximus, *Amb.Th*. 5.57-65 (CCSG 48. 22); *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129bc).

The coordination of the apophatic and kataphatic dialectic with that of *theologia* and *economia* is only strengthened in Maximus for whom, as Andrew Louth has suggested, '[t]he movement between apophatic and kataphatic is not a matter of a dialectic between two kinds of human logic in speaking of God; rather, it is a movement between God's own hidden life and his engagement with creation…'.[55]

[55] Andrew Louth, 'Apophatic Theology and the Liturgy in St. Maximos the Confessor', in id., *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrios of Pontos and Maximos the Confessor,* 1997 Paine Lectures in Religion, ed. Jill Raitt (Columbia, Mo.: Department of Religious Studies, University of Missouri, 1997), 42.

Denial and affirmation, like *theologia* and *economia*, are antithetical yet complementary registers in which one and the same God gives himself to be acknowledged to be who he is by the removal of every illusion of what he is not.[56]

[56] *Amb.Io*. 34 (PG 91. 1288c).

To Maximus' mind, the 'double' character of divine revelation and human apprehension is demonstrated most concretely and paradigmatically in the transfiguration of Christ as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here the 'vertical' configuration of Dionysius is woven into a hermeneutic more strongly eschatological and anagogical in character. It is with specific reference to the transfiguration as τὰ θεοπρεπῆ δραματουργήματα that we find him referring to 'the two universal modes of theology'.[57]

[57] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1165b).

The hidden (uncreated) and symbolic (created) are united in a paradoxical dialectic: the Word's concealment in flesh, garments, and cloud is seen to be the very means of his self-manifestation. Like Gregory of Nyssa's Sinai, **end p.31** Tabor is 'the mountain of theology', up to which the Word ascends with Peter, James, and John—those who have acquired faith, hope, and love respectively. There 'he is transfigured before them', which, as Maximus explains, means that he is 'no longer referred to kataphatically as "God" and "holy" and "king" and suchlike, but is spoken of apophatically according to the terms "beyond-God" and "beyond-holy" and all the terms of transcendence'.[58]

[58] *QD* 191.41-6 (CCSG 10. 134).

For the disciples, whose bodily and spiritual senses have been purified, and who have passed over (μετέβησαν) from flesh to spirit, it is the moment of recognition whereby Christ's true identity as the eternally begotten Word of the Father becomes apparent. His shining face radiates the unapproachable brightness of his divinity,[59]

[59] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1125d-1128a).

'the characteristic hiddenness of his essence'[60]

[60] *QD* 191.48 (CCSG 10. 134).

which he shares with the Father and the Spirit. In the transfigured Word-made-flesh, Maximus comprehends a miraculous matrix where *theologia* and *economia*, *apophasis* and *kataphasis*, unknowing and knowing intersect in a salvific, universally effective economy:

For it was necessary [61]

[61] Reading Ἔδει in place of εἶδει with Karl-Heinz Uthemann, 'Christ's Image *versus* Christology: Thoughts on the Justiniac Era as Threshold of an Epoch', in Pauline Allen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (eds.), *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?* (Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1996), 204.

for him without any change in himself to be created like us, accepting for the sake of his immeasurable love for humankind to become the type and symbol of himself, and from himself symbolically to represent himself, and through the manifestation of himself to lead to himself in his complete and secret hiddenness the whole creation; and while he remains quite unknown in his hidden, secret place beyond all things, unable to be known or understood by any being in any way whatsoever, out of his love for humankind he grants to human beings intimations of himself in his manifest divine works performed in the flesh. [62]

[62] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1165d-1168a).

What we are seeing at work here is a dynamic, paradoxical engagement whereby the purified and receptive human subject comes to penetrate with the eye of faith the corporeal, symbolic structures that veil the substance of the Word in order to apprehend him in the hidden, undisclosed, radiant reality of his pre-incarnate (theological) state. Such radiance is of course blinding, and as such can only be experienced as darkness. The movement of the Word **end p.32** from his radiant hiddenness to his veiled manifest form involves then an act of loving condescension on his part. As the φιλάνθρωπος, the Word initially gives himself to people according to their limited, sense-oriented means of apprehension. Thus in the *Chapters on Theology* Maximus says that the 'first encounter' (πρώτη προσβολή) with the Logos is with his flesh—with his incarnate, veiled form. The reference occurs within a series of chapters that meditate on the contrast between the Lord's presence and absence experienced respectively as 'face to face' vision and vision 'as in a mirror' (1 Cor. 13: 12). [63]

[63] *Th.Oec*. 2.57-61 (PG 90. 1149b-1152b).

Maximus considers these categories in turn in connection with the progression from the active to the contemplative life.

The Lord is sometimes absent, sometimes present. He is absent in terms of face to face vision; he is present in terms of vision in a mirror and in enigmas.

To the one engaged in ascetic struggle the Lord is present through the virtues, but absent from him who takes no account of virtue. And again, to the contemplative he is present through the true knowledge of the things that are, but absent to him who somehow misses it. [64]

[64] *Th.Oec*. 2.57-8 (PG 90. 1149bc).

We might also draw attention to the marked tactility of this first, gracious encounter established by divine initiative. The terms Maximus uses not only recall the way in which sacramental initiation is grounded in sense experience, but allude to the narrative sequence in the transfiguration account itself (Matt. 17: 7), in which Jesus 'drew near' (προσῆλθεν) to his disciples and 'touched' (ἁψάμενος) them. Left to itself, the soul

would be utterly powerless to ascend to God, '*unless God himself*, having drawn near to it, *touch* (ἅψηται) it by condescension and lead it up to himself; for the human mind has no such power to ascend, to apprehend any divine illumination as it were, *unless God himself* draw it up—as far as it is possible—and himself illumine it with divine brightness'. [65]

[65] *Th.Oec*. 1.31 (PG 90. 1093d-1096a).

The sensible symbol by which the Word draws near is not other than himself. It *is* himself. In becoming flesh, he has become his own symbol and thus sensibly accessible. The resulting apprehension of the Lord is however also conditioned by the spiritual state and progress of the subject. The manifestation of the Logos is not univocal. It is, crassly put, personally tailored according to the receptivity of the human person in such a way as to advance him **end p.33** from knowledge of the Logos' flesh to knowledge of his 'glory'. On this we shall say more in due course.

In following Maximus' distinctions between various levels or stages in the revelatory process, we must keep in mind the integrative unity between the two dimensions of the hidden and symbolic, the apophatic and the kataphatic, a unity Maximus repeatedly asserts in his insistence on the unity of *praxis* and *theoria* over against an unhealthy preoccupation with one to the exclusion of the other. In *Chapters on Theology* 2.37-9 for instance, he makes a point he demonstrates more fully elsewhere concerning the essential co-inherence of the ascetic and contemplative dimensions of the spiritual life. [66]

[66] See *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1145ab); *Amb.Io*. 57 (PG 91. 1380d-1381b); *Q.Thal*. 3.17-22 (CCSG 7. 55); *Q.Thal*. 58.64-9 (CCSG 22. 31).

He links them respectively with our two epistemological categories of *kataphasis* and *apophasis*, which in turn are aspects of the self-manifestation of the Word in the flesh on the one hand, and the *transitus* from the Word-made-flesh to the spiritual Word in his pre-incarnate form on the other:

In the active life, the Word—becoming thick by means of the virtues—becomes flesh. Whereas in the contemplative life—becoming subtle by spiritual thoughts—he becomes what he was in the beginning: God the Word.

He makes the Word flesh who, by the denser words and examples, applies the teaching of the Word to moral practice according to the corresponding potential of the hearers; and again, he makes the Word spirit who expounds mystical theology through sublime visions.

He who theologizes kataphatically with affirmations makes the Word flesh—having nothing other than what can be seen or felt in order to know God as cause. But he who theologizes apophatically with negations makes the Word spirit, as 'in the beginning' he 'was God' and 'was with God' (John 1: 1)—working from absolutely nothing of what can be known, [yet] knowing well the utterly unknowable.

We may conclude this section with a number of summary observations. As a revelatory economy the incarnation is still a trinitarian event. [67]

[67] See also *Q.Thal*. 2.22-8 (CCSG 7. 51); 60.94-114 (CCSG 22. 79); *Or.dom*. 87-97 (CCSG 23. 31); *Amb.Io*. 61 (PG 91. 1385d); *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 77bc); 20 (PG 91. 240c). The Father approves (εὐδοκῶν) the incarnation; the Son personally effects it (αὐτουργῶν); the Spirit cooperates in it (συνεργῶν). Cf. Greg.Naz. *Or*. 28.1.13-15 (SC 250. 100).

The Christian ascent from flesh to spirit, earthly to heavenly is not cosmic or spatial, or even metaphysical, **end p.34** but *theological*: it is a movement from fallen creaturely existence to participation in the hidden communion of the holy Trinity. It is

therefore the implicitly trinitarian structure of revelation, centred upon the revelation of the Word in the flesh, that shapes Maximus' understanding of the need to advance through the flesh of the incarnate Word to lay hold of the 'naked' Word himself. For the whole Spirit and the whole Father are substantially united with the Word.[68]

[68] *Th.Oec*. 2.71 (PG 90. 1156d). On the fundamentally trinitarian shape of revelation in Maximus, see further Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 32; Felix Heinzer, 'L'explication trinitaire de l'Économie chez Maxime le Confesseur', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium*, 161-4.

Repeatedly in the *Chapters on Theology* we come across the phrase 'the Word/the Son *of the Father*'.[69]

[69] See, for example, *Th.Oec*. 2.21 (PG 90. 1133d); 2.25 (PG 90. 1136bc); 2.71 (PG 90. 1156d-1157a).

The bodily manifestation of the Word-Son has as its ultimate object *the revelation of the Father*, who is 'by nature completely inseparable from the whole of his Word'.[70]

[70] *Th.Oec*. 2.71 (PG 90. 1156d-1157a). Also *Th.Oec*. 2.22 (PG 90. 1133d-1136a): 'Just as our human word which proceeds naturally from the mind is the messenger of the secret movements of the mind, so does the Word of God—who knows the Father in essence, since the Word knows the Mind which has begotten it (and no created being can approach the Father without him)—reveal the Father whom he knows.'

In apprehending the Word, a person receives, or better, is received by the complete holy Trinity. It is not finally the vision of the glory of the Son to which the worthy attain, but the vision of the glory of the Father—in the Son—through the Spirit.[71]

[71] *Th.Oec*. 2.73 (PG 90. 1157bc).

This never detracts from Maximus' strongly christocentric and essentially incarnational vision. In fact it strengthens it, for there can be no vision of the hidden Father except in the visible incarnate Son. But there are different levels of apprehension of the divine Word that are conditioned by the corresponding level of knowledge of the inner meaning and salvific purpose of the incarnation. That is why, argues Maximus, the divine apostle Paul knew only 'in part' (1 Cor. 13: 12), whereas the great evangelist John saw the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father (John 1: 14).[72]

[72] *Th.Oec*. 2.76 (PG 90. 1160c-1161a).

Paul's partial knowledge is the knowledge of the Word through ascetic activity; John, on the other hand, pierces through the visible flesh of the Word and beholds the hidden yet revealed λόγο and σκοπό of the incarnation, that is, its specifically and inherently salvific (δι' ἥμα) dimension, viewed teleologically. This dimension has as its **end p.35** ultimate author and source not the Son, but the Father. It is the Father's glory which the only-begotten has made known (John 1: 18). It is God's μεγαλή βουλή of which the incarnate Word is ἄγγελο . In the overall fulfilment of that plan through the incarnation lies the accomplishment of our deifying adoption as sons of God.[73]

[73] *Th.Oec*. 2.21-5 (PG 90. 1133d-1136c). The christological titles of Isaiah 9: 6 are attributed to the ἄγγελο μεγάλη βουλη of Isaiah 9: 5. Origen had also applied this office to Christ (Or. *Joh*. 1.38.278 (SC 120. 198)). Dionysius links it with John 15: 15 as an aspect of Jesus' revelation of the Father (*De coel.hier*. 4.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 24.1-4)). Maximus treats the topic further in *Or.dom*. 39-49 (CCSG 23. 28-9); *Q.Thal*. 60.5-48 (CCSG 22. 73-5).

THREE LAWS AND FOUR INCARNATIONS

We have already indicated the central place the transfiguration occupies in Maximus' theological vision. In the transfigured body of Christ he recognizes an archetypal locus in which the human union with God by faith and the reciprocal, corresponding universal theophany of divine glory is proleptically demonstrated. [74]

[74] On the place of the transfiguration in the patristic tradition in general, see John A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 99-143.

Two accounts in the Gospels (Matt. 17: 1-8; Luke 9: 28-36) occupy his attention in a number of contexts, [75]

[75] *QD* 190.1-193.23 (CCSG 10. 131-6); *Th.Oec*. 1.97 (PG 90. 1121c-1124a); 2.13-16 (PG 90. 1129c-1132c).

but nowhere more fully than in the tenth *Ambiguum*. [76]

[76] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1125d-1133a; 1156b; 1160c-1169b).

Having already seen the importance of the 'double' way of theology, we must now explore further Maximus' application of this hermeneutic to the synoptic narrative where Christ's 'garments' and 'flesh' serve as a paradigmatic analogy of how 'God gives himself to be beheld through visible things'. [77]

[77] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129a).

Each represents one of the two dimensions—visible and invisible, kataphatic and apophatic—by which God conceals and reveals himself in the economy of creation.

It is in this connection that we find Maximus expounding his understanding of the 'two laws'—the 'natural' and the 'written' (τὸν τε φυσικὸν καὶ τὸν γραπτόν), each of which corresponds to the respective incarnate economies of the divine Word in cosmos and Scripture. While earlier proponents of the Origenian tradition **end p.36** knew of the cosmos as a vast book, it has been recognized that the coordination of cosmos and Scripture as equally valuable and equally effective economies represents Maximus' own development. [78]

[78] 'Maximus envisions creation and scripture as objective economies of divine revelation that stand in a perfect analogous relation to the Logos-Revealer…. The written law is thus no longer an intermediate degree between natural revelation and the revelation of Christ; rather, nature and history are equal poles that complement one another eschatologically.' Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 102; see also von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 288-300 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 291-301); Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 77-8.

Both laws are equally necessary for spiritual advancement, for they are 'of equal honour and teach (παιδεύοντα) the same things as one another'. [79]

[79] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1128cd).

Indeed, they are 'the same' (ταὐτόν). [80]

[80] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1152a).

What also becomes especially interesting in Maximus is his coordination of these two incarnate economies with the historic incarnation in Christ. There are in fact 'three laws': the natural, the written, and the 'spiritual law' or 'law of grace'. While Maximus recognizes their respective integrity as 'different modes of a divine way of life' (τοῦ διαφόρου βίου δρόμου τοῦ κατὰ θεόν), [81]

[81] *Q.Thal*. 64.730-1 (CCSG 22. 233).

he also knows them together to constitute a single law which converges (συνάγεται) in Christ who as creator (δημιουργὸ) is the author of natural law, and as provider and lawgiver (προνοητὴ καὶ νομοθέτη) is the giver of the written law.[82]

[82] *Q.Thal*. 19.7-22 (CCSG 7. 119); 39.14-17 (CCSG 7. 259); 64.738-93 (CCSG 22. 233-7).

Or as von Balthasar writes, 'The third law, which Christ gives and embodies, brings both of them to fulfillment and final unity, in that it simultaneously removes the limitations of both.'[83]

[83] *Kosmische Liturgie*, 289 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 292).

Turning to Maximus' meditation on the transfiguration, we find his synthesis of the sensible and intelligible dimensions of these three economies situated under the rubrics of concealment and revelation:

For just as, when calling the words of holy Scripture the garments of the Word, and interpreting its intelligible realities (τὰ νοήματα) as his flesh, we conceal him in the first case and reveal him in the second, so too when calling the external forms and visible shapes of created beings garments, and interpreting the hidden principles (τοὺ λόγου) in accordance with which these forms and shapes have been created as his flesh, we likewise conceal in the first case, and reveal in the second. For the Word, who is **end p.37** the creator of the universe and the lawgiver and by nature invisible, in appearing conceals himself, and in concealing himself is made manifest….[84]

[84] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129b).

Judging by the emphasis upon interpretative actions ('we conceal…we reveal') Maximus seems to be making his point on the interpretative, existential plane, though it is based on an economic reality: the Word in appearing conceals himself, and in concealing himself is made manifest. Just as the garments which veil the Lord become in the eschatological moment of sight transparent to the flesh concealed beneath, so do the words of Scripture and the corporeal forms of the ordered universe become translucent to 'the intelligible realities' and 'hidden principles' embedded in them. The entire scheme including the economy of Christ is perhaps best viewed diagramatically.

Perhaps what is most striking about this schema is that the flesh of Christ is ordered together with *invisible*, *intelligible* realities as an aspect of revelation, not concealment. While the visible dimensions constitute indispensable elements in each economy, Christ's transfigured flesh is seen already to take part in another order again, that is, the intelligible order. His flesh thus functions as the 'bridge' between the intelligible and the sensible spheres. By virtue of the hypostatic union, it already transcends the normal sensible order; yet, by its location within the sensible order, it is the means

TABLE 1: The three economies and the function of their components

Economy	Concealment	Revelation
Christ	Garments (ἱμάτια)	Flesh (σάρκα)[†]
Written law	Words	Intelligible realities

(Scripture) (τὰ ῥήματα) (τὰ νοήματα)
Natural law Forms and shapes Hidden principles
(created beings)(τὰ εἴδη τε καὶ σχήματα)(οἱ λόγοι)

† This rare use of σάρξ in the plural designates flesh that is to be consumed as food. In Maximus' *Amb.Io*. 48 (PG 91. 1364b) it explicitly refers to the eucharistic body of Christ, 'the Lamb of God'. See also Clem. *Str*. 5.10.66.2 (SC 276. 134.6-10). **end p.38**

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by which we too may transcend the limited realm of the material and finite. Such a relation between the sensible and the intelligible dimensions is best understood, as I.-H. Dalmais has observed, as one controlled by the dialectic of preparation-realization rather than by a strict antithesis between figure and reality. [85]

[85] I.-H. Dalmais, 'La manifestation du Logos dans l'homme et dans l'Église: Typologie anthropologique et typologie ecclésiale d'après *Qu.Thal*. 60 et la *Mystagogie*', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium*, 21.

Nor do these two dimensions merely sit side by side, independent of one another. On the contrary, von Balthasar has referred to a mutual *perichoresis*—a reciprocal interpenetration—that takes place between them on account of their mutually shared 'universal principle' (γενικὸς λόγος). [86]

[86] *Kosmische Liturgie*, 170 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 172); see also *Amb.Io*. 17 (PG 91. 1228c); Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 29.

Despite their natural ontological differences, both sensible and intelligible share the fact of having been created out of nothing, and therefore the capacity of being united as a single, dynamic medium of divine glory. [87]

[87] *Q.Thal*. 2.15-30 (CCSG 7. 51); see further Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 398-401; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 98-9.

Nevertheless, only the intelligible realities share with God an intelligible nature, and thus the visible, sensible elements clearly remain subordinate to them, just as *kataphasis* is subordinate to *apophasis*, *economia* to *theologia*, concealment to revelation, *praxis* to *theoria*.

Our next question must be to ask further about the relation between these three incarnate economies. We have seen that Maximus stresses the *equality* of the natural and written laws—what Blowers refers to as their 'fundamental reciprocity' on account of a common underlying symbolic structure, and thus 'their common access to the intelligible mystery of the incarnate Logos'. [88]

[88] Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 106.

Indeed, Maximus applies to all three economies a metaphor originally used by Gregory Nazianzen in a sermon preached for the festival of Theophany (Epiphany) with explicit reference to the enfleshment in Christ of the incorporeal Word. [89]

[89] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 38.2.16-20 (SC 358. 106).

In each economy, the visible, sensible, symbolic dimensions designate the realm in which the Word, who is 'subtle' (λεπτός) by nature, [90]

[90] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129c).

has 'thickened himself' (παχυθέντα). [91]

[91] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129d).

In *Ambiguum* 33 Maximus is called upon to deal with Gregory's statement that 'the **end p.39** Word became thick'.[92]

[92] *Amb.Io*. 33 (PG 91. 1285c-1288a).

Perhaps it was thought to sound suspiciously Origenist, for Evagrius in his *Kephalaia Gnostica* had accounted for the 'thickness' attaching to pre-existent intellects by referring to their fall and subsequent punitive embodiment.[93]

[93] Evag. *Keph*. 6.20 (A. Guillaumont (ed. and trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus. Les six centuries de Kephalaia gnostica* (Patrologia Orientalis 28/1, Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958), 225).

Yet following the most natural meaning of the phrase in its context in Gregory, Maximus first supplies a christological interpretation:

The Word is said to be 'thickened' by the inspired teacher…because the Word, who is simple and incorporeal and feeds spiritually all the divine powers in heaven in succession, deemed it worthy also to thicken himself through his incarnate coming from us, for us, and like us yet without sin, and fittingly to expound to us through words and patterns a teaching concerning the ineffable which far transcends the power of all rational discourse. For it is said that everything has been taught through parables, and that nothing is explained without a parable (cf. Matt. 13: 34). For so it pleases teachers to use parables whenever their pupils do not understand things spoken in archetypal form (πρωτοτύπω)[94]

[94] Blowers (*Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 120) I think tends to obscure the full import of this adverb by translating τοῖ πρωτοτύπω λεγομένοι as 'what they originally said'.

and to lead them on to true perception of the things said.[95]

[95] *Amb.Io*. 33 (PG 91. 1285c).

The transition Maximus records here from *theologia* to *economia* is exactly as one finds it in Gregory. The eternal and transcendent Word becomes a true flesh-and-blood human being in order to draw humanity in himself up to God. Especially notable in Maximus' exposition is the phrase 'through his incarnate coming from us, for us, and like us' (διὰ τῆς ἐνσάρκου αὐτοῦ παρουσίας ἐξ ἡμῶν δι' ἡμᾶς καθ' ἡμᾶς), by which he emphasizes the mutual interdependence of the soteriological and realistic dimensions of the Word's enfleshed presence. We may note also the parallel he draws between the incarnation and Jesus' use of parables. As the true pedagogue, the Word presents himself symbolically in order to lead us to a true perception (συναίσθησιν) of the archetype.

Next Maximus follows with two alternative interpretations of Gregory's phrase regarding the Word's 'thickening' himself. The first represents the Word's cosmic economy: **end p.40**

Or [it could be said that the Word 'becomes thick' in the sense that], having ineffably hidden himself in the defining sub-structures (τοῖς λόγοις) of created beings for our sake, he indicates himself by analogy through each visible being, as through certain letters, wholly present in his utter fullness in the whole universe and at the same time wholly present in individual things. He is wholly present and undiminished. Remaining, as always, without difference, he is present in different things; simple and uncompounded, he is in the compounded; without beginning, he is in things that have a beginning; invisible, he is in visible things; intangible, he is in tangible things.[96]

[96] *Amb.Io*. 33 (PG 91. 1285d).

Finally Maximus presents the Word's scriptural economy:

Or [it could be said that the Word 'becomes thick' in the sense that], for our sake who are dense in disposition, he consented to embody himself for us and to be represented through letters and syllables and sounds so that, with us following him little by little from these things, he might lead us to himself, joined by the Spirit, and make us ascend into subtle and unlimited understanding of him who contracted us for his sake into his own union to the same extent that he expanded himself for our sake by the principle of condescension.[97]

[97] *Amb.Io*. 33 (PG 91. 1288a). Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 60-1) identifies the Neoplatonic dialectic of expansion (διαστολή) and contraction (συστολή) as a metaphysical law describing the movement from unity into differentiation and back to unity. He rightly concludes 'that in Maximus' view the movement of διαστολή, of differentiation, as the movement of God's condescension in creation, comes very close to the incarnation, and the movement of συστολή, consequently, comes close to deification'.

Much could be said about the cosmic and scriptural dispensations in which the Word 'thickens' himself, but in view of Maximus' strongly cosmological ontology which we shall be examining in greater detail in the next chapter, we shall here concentrate primarily on his understanding of the written law, that is, the Word's incarnate economy in Scripture. How are the scriptural and christological economies related? We recall our discussion above about Maximus' symbolic identification of Christ's 'garments' with the 'words' of Scripture and his 'flesh' with their intelligible contents or meaning. Through his historic incarnation as Christ, the divine Word—who 'remains quite unknown in his hidden, secret place beyond all things, unable to be known or understood by any being in any way whatsoever'—lovingly condescends to become 'a type and symbol of himself' thereby granting human beings 'intimations of himself in the **end p.41** manifest divine works performed in the flesh'.[98]

[98] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1165d-1168a).

In like manner we find Maximus positioning the scriptural economy in a marked dialectic with theological inaccessibility, explaining that 'it is customary for Scripture to represent unspeakable and hidden intentions of God in corporeal terms (σωματικῶ), so that we may be able to perceive divine realities through the words and sounds that are comformable to our nature, since God is unknowable Mind, ineffable Word and inaccessible Spirit…'.[99]

[99] *Q.Thal*. 28.42-6 (CCSG 7. 205).

It is apparent then that the scriptural and the christological economies share as a whole the same structure and purpose. In what way then, we may ask, are they distinct? Is there any *qualitative* difference between them?[100]

[100] Blowers pursues this question at some length, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 117-30. See also Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 73-9.

Torstein Tollefsen has argued on the basis of his reading of *Ambiguum* 33 that Maximus restricts the word 'enfleshment' to the Word's economy in the historic incarnation, using instead 'embodiment' to refer to his economies in Scripture and cosmos.[101]

[101] *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 84-5.

While we may concur with the sense of Tollefsen's conclusion, there are passages where this terminological distinction does not hold.[102]

[102] e.g. *Th.Oec*. 1.91 (PG 90. 1121c); 2.38-42 (PG 90. 1141d-1144c); 2.60 (PG 90. 1149c-1152a).

Once again it will be useful to look back to Origen as the spiritual father of the anagogical hermeneutical tradition which Maximus inherits. Origen knows no division between Christ and the divine Word who is the true but hidden content of Scripture—its mind (νου) or spirit (πνευμα). For him 'Christ and Scripture are identified, the latter being already an incarnation of the Word in writing, which is analogous to flesh; nor is it another and different incarnation, since it is completely related to the one incarnation…'.[103]

[103] Crouzel, 'The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', 166-7.

Anagogical exegesis presupposes this identification: Christ is Scripture's sole object. He is, in de Lubac's splendid phrase, its 'whole exegesis'.[104]

[104] Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, i, trans. Mark Sebanc (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 237.

Anagogy is the integration of the reader via the material symbol of the text into its divine content.[105]

[105] See further Karen Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Patristische Texte und Studien 28, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 124-38.

Scripture's purpose has been fulfilled when through end p.42 ascesis the believer himself *becomes* Scripture—a living symbol of Christ.[106]

[106] On this distinctive feature of monastic exegesis, see Douglas Burton-Christie, '"Practice makes Perfect": Interpretation of Scripture in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*', *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989), 213-18.

Nevertheless, for Maximus as for Origen, holy Scripture contains its own intra-structural dimensions that are to be distinguished and not confused. The first of these, as we have mentioned, is the distinction between the letter and the spirit.[107]

[107] *Th.Oec*. 1.91 (PG 90. 1120d-1121a); *Q.Thal*. 32.17-33 (CCSG 7. 225).

Parallel to this is the distinction between the Old Testament and the New, the Law and the Gospel.[108]

[108] *Th.Oec*. 1.89-93 (PG 90. 1120c-1121b).

The New Testament inheres and is mysteriously hidden in the letter of the Old. In turn the Law is the shadow of the Gospel, and the Gospel the image of the good things to come. And the Old Testament is again divided into the Law and the Prophets, the former a shadow and the latter an image of the divine and spiritual benefits contained in the Gospel. Still another tripartite scheme in holy Scripture becomes evident in its partial or progressive revelation (ἡ κατὰ μέρο φανέρωσι) of the trinitarian mystery, in that it moves from a confession of the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit.[109]

[109] *Amb.Io*. 23 (PG 91. 1261a). The passage bears strong echoes of the ancient doctrine of three orders or eras in which God progressively reveals himself as Father (Israel/OT), Son (Christ/NT), and Holy Spirit (Church). Maximus probably drew it directly from Greg.Naz. *Or*. 31.26 (SC 250. 326-8). This tripartite arrangement arises also in *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1241d-1256c) as shadow (Old Covenant and its worship), image (New Covenant and its worship), and truth (the coming age).

Each 'component' possesses a carefully schematized, irreducible function in the overall scriptural and historical dispensation. The fact that Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, appear with Christ on the mountain of transfiguration is highly significant in this regard. In themselves the written media of the old covenant are 'dead'—destined to pass away like the body. But coordinated with Christ, they are able to fulfil a saving, revelatory, pedagogical function, which is nothing less than their true

(teleological) 'mind' or purpose. That true purpose is to testify to the 'law of grace', to the Gospel—to the Christ who 'unfolds eschatologically' [110]

[110] Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 124.

their intelligible contents. In a kind of reversal of its own progressive trinitarian order, Scripture's true purpose is to lead us in the Spirit **end p.43** from its multiple 'words' to the singular 'Word' in whom we come finally to the Father. [111]

[111] *Th.Oec*. 2.20-2 (PG 90. 1133c-1136a).

So Maximus can say:

Whenever the Word of God becomes bright and shining in us, and his face becomes dazzling like the sun, then also are his clothes more radiant, that is, the words of the holy Scripture of the Gospels are clear and distinct and contain nothing hidden. Moreover, both Moses and Elijah stand beside him, that is, the more spiritual meanings of the Law and the Prophets. [112]

[112] *Th.Oec*. 2.14 (PG 90. 1132a).

Returning now to *Ambiguum* 33, we may offer some final remarks on the relationship between the 'three laws'. The syntactical structure of the whole passage undergirds Maximus' regard for the structural and effective equality of all three economies. Each is introduced as a valid alternative (ἢ ὅτι… ἢ ὅτι… ἢ ὅτι) with an equally effective soteriological thrust (δι’ἡμα …δι’ἡμα … δι’ἡμα). In the summary sentence enclosing Maximus' classic *tantum-quantum* (τοσοῦτον… ὅσον) formulation, [113]

[113] See von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 277-8 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 280-1); Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 31-2; Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 376-82.

again with an explicit soteriological marker (δι’ἡμα), we are given a glimpse of his overarching incarnational, revelatory metaphysics. The 'thickening' or 'expansion' of the Word is simultaneously the 'thinning' or 'contraction' of the 'density' of human nature—its opacity to divine things. The movement is not temporally sequential, nor does it imply the dematerialization of human nature. It is rather a two-dimensional description of the Word's self-expansion into and penetration of the universe and the reciprocal, simultaneous transfiguration and contraction of the universe into him. In this respect Blowers' comments are instructive: 'The natural law and the written law, creation and scripture, are grounded in the preexistent and transcendent Logos. In Maximus' thought, however, the transcendent Logos is never conceptually separate from the *historically* incarnate Christ.' [114]

[114] *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 118.

And turning to Thunberg we also find a fitting analysis:

The cosmological (ontological), the providential and the historical Logos are not separate elements in Maximus' theology, but consciously depicted as one and the same: Christ, the Son of God the Father, and the Lord of the Church. He is the centre of the universe in the same manner as he is the centre of the economy of salvation.… [T]he Logos, on account of his **end p.44** general will to incarnate himself, holds together not only the λόγοι of creation but also the three aspects of creation, revelation (illumination) and salvation. [115]

[115] *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77.

By his incarnation the eternal Word establishes in time a single, universal, theophanic economy by which the natural and written economies which we experience as distinct are constituted as effective revelatory and saving dispensations. Only on this basis can Maximus posit the equal revelatory efficacy of the two laws. In other words, they have no

independent metaphysical or salutary status apart from the Word who is none other than the crucified and risen incarnate Saviour Jesus Christ:

The mystery of the Word's incarnation contains the force of all the hidden meanings and types in Scripture, and the understanding of visible and intelligible creatures. The one who knows the mystery of the cross and tomb knows the true nature (τοὺ λόγου) of these aforementioned things. And the one who has been initiated into the ineffable power of the resurrection knows the purpose for which God originally made all things. [116]

[116] *Th.Oec*. 1.66 (PG 90. 1108ab).

On the other hand, as Blowers has demonstrated, the two laws cannot be reduced or collapsed into one as though their specific functions in the progressive, revelatory enactment of the eternal divine plan were of no account. [117]

[117] Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 118-19.

Alongside these three economies in which the Word is said to become thick, Maximus hints at yet a fourth, equally important economy—one we have already encountered with Gregory Nazianzen's 'thickening' metaphor in the *Chapters on Theology*. It is, namely, the life of virtue: 'In the active life, the Word—becoming thick by means of the virtues—becomes flesh.' [118]

[118] Ἐν μὲν πρακτικῷ, τοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν τρόποις παχυνόμενος ὁ λόγος γίνεται σάρξ (*Th.Oec*. 2.37 (PG 90. 1141c)).

As the caption heading this section suggests, Maximus envisages the life of virtue as an 'incarnation' of the Word no less real and effective than his three incarnate economies in cosmos, Scripture, and Christ. The texts we could adduce are many, and will come up for closer analysis later during the course of our whole study. Here we shall simply try to focus upon the *revelatory* character of this incarnation with a view to discerning its impact upon the body.**end p.45**

Behind Maximus' thinking on this point there lies his fully developed understanding of the direct and mutual reciprocity between divine incarnation and human deification. In the traditions represented by St Irenaeus, St Athanasius, and St Augustine this reciprocity was expressed in variations of the well-known phrase, 'God became man that we might become God.' [119]

[119] Iren. *Haer*. 3.19.1 (SC 211. 370-4); Ath. *Inc*. 54.3 (SC 199. 458); Aug. *Serm*. 192.1.1 (John E. Rotelle (ed.) and Edmund Hill (trans.), *Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, iii. vi. *Sermons 184-229z* (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 46).

With Gregory Nazianzen we notice a shift related to his soteriological principle *quod non est assumptum non est sanatum*—what is not assumed is not healed. [120]

[120] τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον. Greg.Naz. *Ep*. 101.32 (SC 208. 50).

He introduces to the traditional phrase the *tantum-quantum* formula which we met above in Maximus. United to God in Christ, human nature became one with God, 'so that I might become God *so far as* he has become man' (ἵνα γένωμαι τοσοῦτον Θεός, ὅσον ἐκεῖνος ἄνθρωπος). [121]

[121] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 29.19.9-10 (SC 250. 218). Catherine Osborne also detects in Origen the presence of an 'inverse symmetry' between human assimilation to God through love and God's love for humankind. See her important study *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 182.

Man's deification is not only reciprocally related, but directly and quantifiably proportionate to the extent of God's humanization, and dependent upon it. Maximus however takes this proportionate dependence of human deification upon God's incarnation one step further by asserting the dependence of God's incarnation upon human deification. God takes bodily form in man *to the extent that man deifies himself* through the cultivation of virtue. The widely acknowledged *locus classicus* for this doctrine is found in *Ambiguum* 10:

For [the Fathers] say that God and man are paradigms of one another: God is humanized to man through love for humankind to the extent that man, enabled through love, deifies himself to God; and man is caught up spiritually by God to what is unknown to the extent that he manifests God, who is invisible by nature, through the virtues. [122]

[122] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1113bc). I follow Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Studia Anselmiana 36, Rome: Herder, 1955), 144 n. 35, in reading τὸ ἄγνωστον in place of τὸ γνωστόν.

What Maximus is depicting here is not so much 'another' incarnation distinct from Christ as the progressive and proleptic incorporation of the Christian into the revelatory and deifying **end p.46** dynamic of the Word's one glorious incarnation. The same dynamic is apparent when we consider another crucial passage in *Ambiguum* 7 where, omitting the τοσοῦτον—ὅσον formula, Maximus describes the threefold result of having actively 'engraved and formed' (ἐντυπώσα τε καὶ μορφώσα) God alone in oneself entirely:

The result is that he too is and is called 'God' by grace, that God by condescension is and is called man for his sake, and that thereby the power of this exchanged condition is displayed. This is the power that deifies man to God on account of love for God, and humanizes God to man on account of God's love for humankind, and which, according to this wonderful exchange, makes God man by the deification of man, and makes man God by the humanization of God. [123]

[123] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1084c).

A number of repeated features are worthy of note. First there is the foundation of this transformative reciprocity in divine love for man (φιλανθρωπία) and human love for God (ἀγάπη, φιλόθεον). Love fills out or 'gives body' at the level of actuality to the union potentially realized in faith. Secondly, correlative to the reciprocal effects of deification and incarnation, expressed by the adoption of Gregory's 'wonderful exchange' (καλὴ ἀντιστροφή), [124]

[124] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 38.4.8 (SC 358. 110). On the development of the idea of the *admirabile commercium* in the Fathers, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*: *Theological Dramatic Theory*, iv. *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 246-54.

we observe the *bodily* manifestation of divine power in the deified subject. In the words that follow the first passage from *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus makes passing reference to the impact of the reciprocal exchange upon 'the nature of the body'. '[A]ccording to this philosophy,' he writes, 'the nature of the body is necessarily ennobled (εὐγενίζεται)' [125]

[125] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1113c).

—that is, it becomes subject to and endowed with reason. [126]

[126] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1116d).

The person 'caught up' in the process of deification becomes an agent of divine manifestation in the ordered totality of his corporeal human nature—a composite unity of

intellect (νοῦ), reason (λόγο), and sense (αἴσθησι). And because God's deifying presence in his body is incarnated as love, it is as it were sacramentally effective: capable of binding both himself and other human beings to God. In other words, the deified subject himself, as God by grace, becomes a means of deifying others. Thus it is speaking of love experienced *through another person* that Maximus says that 'nothing is more truly Godlike than divine love, **end p.47** nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification'. [127]

[127] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 393b); see also *Myst*. 24: 'nothing is either so fitting for justification or so apt for deification and nearness to God, if I may speak thus, than mercy offered with pleasure and joy from the soul to those in need' (Sotiropoulos 236.22-5).

Now at last we may be in a better position to understand Maximus' coordination of ourselves, the cosmos, and Scripture as 'three human beings'. [128]

[128] *Myst*. 7 (Sotiropoulos 188.10-12).

In their common and essential bipartite structure (sensible-intelligible) all three possess a potentially divisive character, contingent upon their orientation to the 'greater and more hidden economy' of the universal consummation. In so far as cosmos and Scripture *are* a human being, through the reciprocal deification of man and incarnation of God this future 'more hidden economy' (μυστικωτέρα οἰκονομία) [129]

[129] *Myst*. 7 (Sotiropoulos 186.25).

becomes already concretely manifest in space (cosmos) and time (Scripture). Only in deified humanity do cosmos and Scripture attain their proper status and goal. Through the deified person's life of virtue, that is, through faith active in love, both cosmos and Scripture lose their obscuring and concealing and divisive character, and instead their intelligible and divine qualities become manifest. This is what Maximus means when he speaks of a time when 'the body will become like the soul and sensible things like intelligible things in dignity and glory, when the unique divine power will manifest itself in all things in a vivid and active presence proportioned to each one…'. [130]

[130] *Myst*. 7 (Sotiropoulos 188.5-8).

We shall encounter even more explicit statements to the same end towards the latter stages of this chapter.

revelation as symbolic pedagogy

>In several places we have mentioned the specifically pedagogical function of sensible and symbolic media as they occur in the three incarnate economies of God the Word. Cosmos, Scripture, and Christ are carefully schematized and symbolic pedagogies through which the divine Word, employing a whole range of pedagogical skills—from teaching to training, concealment to correction—brings about deifying illumination. Werner Jaeger has demonstrated that for the dominant tradition of spiritual anthropology to which Maximus was heir—that of Gregory of Nyssa—*paideia* was **end p.48** primarily understood in terms of *morphosis* or formation. [131]

[131] *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Mass.:Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 86-7.

Gregory's 'constant repetition of this basic image, which implies the essential identity of all educational activity and the work of the creative artist, painter, and sculptor, reveals the plastic nature of his conception of Greek paideia'. [132]

[132] Ibid., 87.

This is a significant detail for our discussion, for it brings to the fore the positive view of materiality this metaphor assumes. Interestingly it is an aspect of *paideia* that is common

to Christian and Neoplatonist alike. In the first book of the *Enneads*, Plotinus provides the famous illustration of this 'plastic' dimension of *paideia* at work in the sculptor whose basic task is to model his own statue:

Just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat'. [133]

[133] *Enneads* 1.6.9.

Maximus, familiar with this very 'plastic' image of formation from both Gregory of Nyssa [134]

[134] *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* 2.11 (*GNO* v. 115.22-116.26).

and Dionysius, [135]

[135] *De myst.theol*. 2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 145.3-7).

also adopts and develops it in a number of contexts. In some instances it serves as a metaphor of the critical first stage in the pursuit of Christian perfection. In the purgative process of human ascent to God, one must disengage the body from its association with defiling practices and passionate attachments, cutting away from the soul the vices and passions that bind it to transient materiality. 'Some of the passions are of the body, some of the soul. Those of the body take their origin in the body; those of the soul from exterior things. Love and self-control cut away both of them, the former those of the soul, the latter those of the body.' [136]

[136] *Car*. 1.64 (PG 90. 973c). See also *Th.Oec*. 2.17 (PG 90. 1132c-1133a) where the process of cutting away material attachments is explicitly linked as a first stage to progress towards the beatific vision.

In another passage, Maximus' use of the image recalls Plotinus' idea of the discernment of an inner beauty of the soul. *Paideia* leads to clearer vision of the beauty **end p.49** of the divine image. For Maximus, however, that beauty is constituted by the presence of Christ in the heart by baptismal faith:

If, according to the Apostle, 'Christ dwells in our hearts by faith' (Eph. 3: 7), and 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him' (Col. 2: 3), then all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in our hearts.…

This is why the Saviour says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt. 5: 8), because he is hidden in the heart of those who believe in him. They will see him and the treasures in him when they purify themselves by love and self-control, and the more intensely they strive the fuller their vision will be. [137]

[137] *Car*. 4.70, 72 (PG 90. 976a-c).

Developing further the plastic dimension contained in the image of *morphosis*, Jaeger goes on to speak of the analogy with physical development implied by Gregory's understanding of *paideia*. Spiritual development mirrors physical growth, but differs from it in that the former is not spontaneous, but requires constant care and nurture. [138]

[138] Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 87.

If anything, left to itself the soul tends towards change and fragmentation. It is this decline that divine *paideia* corrects and transforms. [139]

[139] See, for instance, Greg.Nyss. *V.Mos*. 2.1-3 (SC 1. 32).

Again we find this analogy between physical and spiritual nourishment developed by Maximus in his answer to a query as to whether the perfect human state is static or involves change. [140]

[140] *Th.Oec*. 2.88 (PG 90. 1165d-1168a).

His answer leads us to recognize that while physical food cannot give spiritual nourishment, spiritual food nourishes both soul *and* body. *Paideia* does not eliminate the body. It transfigures it by giving it a form befitting union with God. The remarkable final stage of the discussion bears close resemblance to passages discussed above in which we observed the reciprocal correspondence between human deification, divine incarnation, and the attendant corporeal revelatory implications:

When [the soul] receives through this food the eternal well-being inherent to it, it becomes God by participation in divine grace, having ceased all activities of mind and sense, and having given rest together with itself to the natural activity of the body joined to the soul by virtue of the body's own commensurate participation in deification. The result is that God **end p.50** alone is made manifest through the soul *and the body*, their natural characteristics having been overwhelmed by the excess of glory. [141]

[141] *Th.Oec*. 2.88 (PG 90. 1165d-1168a). The 'natural characteristics' primarily refer to the features of empirical life bordered by mortality and penetrated by corruption: sexual reproduction, passionate attachment, corruption, and death (*Myst*. 24 (Sotiropoulos 226.6); *Or.dom*. 401 (CCSG 23. 50); *Or.dom*. 697 (CCSG 23. 66)). But they also refer to the natural, bodily, and material characteristics of creation in so far as they are the locus of these corruptive influences and thus bear a divisive character that obscures their true nature and purpose.

So far we have presented examples of *paideia* as an ascetically applied purificatory process that leads towards giving form to the sensible so that it may function as a transparent vehicle of divine theophany. But in the light of our analysis of God's incarnate economies as the fulfilment of his will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment', an understanding of divine revelation as a symbolic pedagogy leads us to consider further Gregory of Nyssa's conception of *paideia* 'in metaphysical terms that project its continuation into cosmic dimensions'. [142]

[142] Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 89.

Andrew Louth has drawn out the implications of such a view. By including *paideia* within his treatment of the 'tacit' nature of tradition, Louth shows how, on the basis of the fact that '*paideia* involves taking seriously the nature of man as a social being', gnostic Christian traditions rejected *paideia* as fundamentally opposed to their individualist, anti-material view of human nature and the world. [143]

[143] *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 76.

The function of *paideia* as the formative operation of the Holy Spirit on human nature and as the cementing force in Christian society carries with it a positive evaluation of material, social, historical existence—an 'underlying vision of the healthy and thoroughly profitable diversity of material symbols…'. [144]

[144] So Blowers concludes with more specific reference to Maximus' exegetical method, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 254.

These contingent material and historical elements—cosmos, Scripture, Church, liturgy, and ascetic *praxis*—constitute the basic symbolic tools God uses in the pedagogic formation of human nature.

This view is confirmed in the last of Maximus' *Ambigua* to John of Cyzicus in which he treats a passage from one of Gregory Nazianzen's poems that invites an interpretation of the cosmos as the arena of divine *paideia*: **end p.51**

For the high Word plays (παίζει) in every kind of form,
Mixing, as he wills, with his world here and there. [145]

[145] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1408c-1416d). The poetic passage is from Greg.Naz. *Praec*. (PG 37. 624a-625a). Text-critical questions related to this passage are treated by Carlos Steel, 'Le Jeu du Verbe. à propos de Maxime, *Amb. ad Ioh*. lxvii', in A. Schoors and P. Van Deun (eds.), *Philohistôr: Miscellanea in Honorem Caroli Laga Septuagenarii* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 60, Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 281-2. I have followed his amended text which reads: Παίζει γὰρ λόγο αἰπὺ

ἐν εἴδεσι παντοδαποῖσι / Κιρνά, ὡ ἐθέλει, κόσμον ἐὸν ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.

Carlos Steel has noted how John of Cyzicus must have been startled by Gregory's ascription of 'play' to the divine Word, since Gregory usually confines the term to the activity of the devil. [146]

[146] 'Le Jeu du Verbe', 282-3.

While Maximus provisionally proffers four interpretations of Gregory's poem, it is possible to discern a common thread: play characterizes the pedagogical interaction of the transcendent God in his cosmic and incarnate economies with what is inherently weak, transient, and unstable. Initially Maximus' focus is more apparently christological. Citing 'the great and fearful mystery of the divine descent of God the Word to the human level accomplished through the flesh', Maximus equates Gregory's sense of the word 'play' (παίγνιον) to St Paul's talk of God's 'foolishness' and 'weakness' in 1 Corinthians 1: 25. By predicating of this mystery what in human terms are privations—play, foolishness, and weakness—both theologians are actually affirming God's possession of transcendent prudence, wisdom, and power. [147]

[147] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1409a-1409c).

In his more difficult second conjecture Maximus however seems to move beyond an exclusively christological interpretation. By 'play' he suggests Gregory means 'the distance or kind of equidistant projection of mediating beings from the extremes' (τὴν τῶν μέσων τυχὸν προβολήν, κατὰ τὸ ἴσον ἀπὸ τῶν ἄκρων ἔχουσαν ἀπόστασιν). [148]

[148] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1412b).

The 'mediating beings' are visible, transient phenomena; the 'extremes' are the invisible realities at the beginning and end of human existence. 'Play' then refers to the bridging of the gap, the uniting of opposites which, as Maximus suggests, is precisely what occurs in the incarnation where the ontological gulf between the divine and human realms is bridged. [149]

[149] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1413a).

But quoting Dionysius, Maximus also depicts it as a cosmic reality brought about by God's loving and ecstatic 'going-out-of-himself' **end p.52** to be present providentially in all creation, the object of his love. [150]

[150] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1413ab). Cf. Dion.Ar. *De div.nom*. 4.13.

The whole 'historical nature' of visible creation, then, is the means by which the transcendent Word stoops playfully like a parent to our limited, childish level of understanding with a view to lead us on to understand reality *sub specie aeternitatis*. [151]

[151] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1413b-1413d).

In comparison with divine reality, empirical existence is indeed 'play'—or even folly. Only by recognizing its inherently phantasmic, unstable character are we made wise to transfer our confidence to what is permanent, stable, and real. [152]

[152] *Amb.Io*. 71 (PG 91. 1416a-1416d).

As can be observed throughout our chapter so far, divine revelation is not simply a one-sided divine display but God's adaptive and progressive engagement with the believing

subject in an effective *paideia* leading to union with himself. In this respect it is appropriate to speak of Maximus' notion of *proportionate* revelation, one he shares with a tradition found in Clement of Alexandria and mediated through Origen in which there is provided an account of 'the economic variability' [153]

[153] John A. McGuckin, 'The Changing Forms of Jesus', in Lothar Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses Innsbruck, 2.-6. September 1985* (Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 215-22.

of the Word in Scripture and cosmos. [154]

[154] On the differences between Clement and Origen, see Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Pedagogical Soteriology from Clement to Origen', in Lies, *Origeniana Quarta*, 370-8.

Origen repeatedly refers to the fact that the incarnate Word is perceived under a variety of forms, without any alteration in himself, according to the varying measure of spiritual capacity found among perceiving subjects. Some look at Christ and see only a man 'without form or beauty'. Others, whose perception has been purified and transformed, look at Christ and see his higher nature—the eternal Word and Son of God the Father. [155]

[155] Or. *Matt*. 12.37 (PG 13. 1068b-1069b); Or. *Cels*. 2.72 (SC 132. 456-8); 4.15-17 (SC 136. 218-24); 6.67-8 (SC 147. 346-50); 7.42-4 (SC 150. 110-20).

It would be nearsighted to evaluate this principle of proportionate, restricted access to divine knowledge as an expression of some kind of elitist esotericism. On the contrary, it is essentially soteriological: the Logos empties himself so that, becoming 'all things to all, he may save all' (1 Cor. 9: 22). [156]

[156] See Or. *Joh*. 1.31.217 (SC 120. 166); Maximus, *Q.Thal*. 47.211-27 (CCSG 7. 325); *Th.Oec*. 2.27 (PG 90. 1137ab).

Origen, **end p.53** who like St Paul and Clement of Alexandria knew knowledge to be dangerous, [157]

[157] 1 Cor. 8: 7; Clem. *Str*. 6.15.124 (SC 136. 218-24); Clem. *Paed*. 3.12.97 (SC 158. 182). Cf. Eccles. 1: 18.

recognized in the Lord a wise pedagogue who sometimes deliberately veiled his teaching, 'so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand' (Luke 8: 10), and who praised his Father for hiding divine things from the wise and learned and revealing them instead to children (Matt. 11: 25).

Even so, in addition to the need to regulate the disclosure of sacred truth in order to guard it from desecration [158]

[158] The biblical text customarily cited in connection with the *disciplina arcani* is Matthew 7: 6.

Dionysius poses as a reason for proportionate, symbolic revelation our own incapacity to perceive divine things directly. [159]

[159] *De coel.hier*. 2.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 11.11-20).

Once again the dual ability of symbols to reveal and conceal is seen to serve a pedagogical purpose. The dizzying multiplicity in the cosmic order and salvation-history which confronts the contemplative constitutes in fact a soteriological function of the Word's symbolic pedagogy in which, by assuming different forms, he reveals himself proportionately and incrementally in a measure commensurate to a person's spiritual state. [160]

[160] See Or. *Matt*. 12.36-8 (PG 13. 1065b-1072a); Or. *Joh*. 1.20 (SC 120. 122-4); Or. *Gen*. 1.7 (SC 7. 40-4); Or. *Lev*. 1.1 (SC 286. 66-70); Or. *Cels*. 4.16-18 (SC 136. 220-8); 6.68 (SC 147. 348-50); 6.77 (SC 147. 370-4).

This doctrine of course presumes the reciprocal and progressive engagement of the knower with the known, the pupil with the pedagogue via these same symbolic media.

Maximus draws these ideas together by means of a number of varying metaphors used mainly in the context of forming in his monastic readership a sensitivity to the multivalence inherent to the world of Scripture.[161]

[161] See Paul M. Blowers' detailed treatment in 'The Anagogical Imagination: Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenian Hermeneutics', in G. Dorival and A. le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et la Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30 août-3 septembre 1993* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovansensium 137, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 639-54.

Looking upon Scripture's various verbal forms, themselves analogously related to the multiple aspects of the *logoi* in creation,[162]

[162] Again we refer to another of Blowers' fine studies, 'The Analogy of Scripture and Cosmos in Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993), 145-9.

'the masses' (οἱ πολλοί) see there only 'flesh' and not its singular Logos. Its true 'mind' or inner meaning (ὁ νου̃ς τη̃ς **end p.54**

Γραφη̃ς), which is actually contrary to appearance (ἕτερον παρὰ τὸ δοκου̃ν), eludes them.[163]

[163] *Th.Oec*. 2.60 (PG 90. 1152a).

Only *theoria* gains access to the one truth of Scripture in all its incorporeal simplicity without becoming bogged down in historical, literal, and bodily contradictions.[164]

[164] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1244b).

And even among believers there are differing levels of spiritual maturity, and therefore of revelation. As the bread of life, the Word nourishes all who ask, but not all in the same way.[165]

[165] *Th.Oec*. 2.56 (PG 90. 1149ab). The metaphor is widely used in Origen.

Maximus distinguishes between 'two forms' of the Word's manifestation: a 'common and more public' appearance and one 'more hidden' and accessible only to a few. Those who encounter him according to the first represent the 'initiates' or 'beginners' (οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι, οἱ νηπίοι), while those who encounter him according to the second are 'the perfect' (οἱ τελειωθέντες, οἱ τέλειοι). It is a distinction he sees as mirroring the scriptural distinction between those who see Jesus 'in the form of a servant' and those who ascend the mountain of transfiguration and see him in his transcendent divine glory.[166]

[166] *Th.Oec*. 1.97 (PG 90. 1121c-1124a); 2.13 (PG 90. 1129c-1132a); 2.28 (PG 90. 1137bc). Cf. Eph. 4: 13-14.

The two groups are determined not so much by categories suggesting the relative inferiority or superiority of one to the other as by their respective and subjective orientation to the final eschatological mystery. 'The infants' are evidently still being led towards 'the age of perfection', whereas 'the perfect' are living prophetic types in whom the Word already—though at a hidden level (κρυφίως)—'is delineating in advance (προδιαγράφων) as in a picture the features of his future coming'.[167]

[167] *Th.Oec*. 2.28 (PG 90. 1137c).

As we shall see more clearly in the next and final section of this chapter, the movement from initiation and spiritual infancy to perfection lies within the power of the believing subject who must devote himself to the imitation of Christ in an ascending programme of ascesis, contemplation, and finally adoration of the holy Trinity. Followers of Christ are not simply neutral or passive recipients of a proportionate revelation tailored to their

spiritual or intellectual capacities. In von Balthasar's memorable phrase, 'Revelation is a battlefield.' [168]

[168] *Theo-Drama*, iv. 12.

The divine gift—whether it be spoken of as faith, vision, grace, adoption—must be engaged, acted

end p.55 upon, put to work, exercised, guarded, and invested. [169]

[169] This does not imply that revelation consists simply in what the knowing subject makes of it. Here we disagree with Marguerite Harl who, in an otherwise magnificent thesis, argues that the notion of proportionate revelation renders the incarnate Word little more than 'an aid, perhaps even a decisive aid', which merely enables the striving subject to acquire divine knowledge himself in such a way that ultimately 'it is not the incarnate word who himself provides the illumination'. *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice du Verbe Incarné* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958), 342-3.

Continual and progressive passage from flesh to spirit, from *kataphasis* to *apophasis*, from *praxis* to *theoria* is both a moral and theological imperative in response to and in cooperation with the divine initiative:

Therefore, the need for further understanding is such that we must first pass through the veils of the letters that surround the Word, and thereby with a naked intellect behold the pure Word himself as he exists in himself—as the one who clearly shows forth the Father in himself—as far as humanly possible. It is necessary for him who piously seeks after God not to hold fast to the letter, lest he unwittingly take words about God in place of God, that is, in place of the Word—precariously being content with the *words* of Scripture, while the *Word* escapes the mind through its holding fast to the garments, all the while thinking it has the incorporeal Word, like the Egyptian woman who took hold not of Joseph, but of his clothes, and also like those men of old who, remaining only in the beauty of visible phenomena, unwittingly worshiped the creation instead of the creator. [170]

[170] *Th.Oec*. 2.73 (PG 90. 1157bc). The incident from Genesis 39: 12 is utilized in the same way in the context of Maximus' exposition of the transfiguration in *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1129a-1133a).

In conclusion then, what has been said of Origen's hermeneutical pedagogy is equally applicable to Maximus' reading of both the cosmic and scriptural worlds: the relationship between the sacred text and its reader is viewed 'not statically, as the passive apprehension of something given, but dynamically as an effort by the exegete to penetrate ever more deeply into the inexhaustible depths of God's Word, according to his own skill and capacity'. [171]

[171] Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes, ed. Anders Berquist and Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 43.

It is on account of both Scripture's divine content and the necessary development of the Christian's spiritual capacity that scriptural interpretation and natural contemplation are never finally definitive but involve recognizing the symbolic plasticity **end p.56** of the economic orders: their 'somehow expansive signification, which stretches along with the understanding of the reader'. [172]

[172] From the description of biblical symbol in the work of the nineteenth-century French bishop Olymphe-Philippe Gerbet, *Esquisse de Rome Chrétienne*, quoted by Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, ii, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 204.

SENSUAL *TAXIS* AND INTELLECTUAL *DIABASIS*

As one ascends the progressive steps of the spiritual life one moves from dependence upon material symbols to a more direct apprehension of the subject they disclose. Indeed, 'the saints' represent the highest way of apprehending divine knowledge when it is said of them that 'they do not acquire the blessed knowledge of God only by sense and appearances and forms, using letters and syllables, which lead to mistakes and bafflement over the discernment of the truth, but solely by the mind, rendered most pure and released from all material mists'. [173]

[173] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1160b).

The words 'solely by the mind' (νῷ μόνῳ) may suggest to our way of thinking that Maximus is advocating an entirely disincarnate, intellectualist form of gnostic speculation. Yet we must remind ourselves that underlying his epistemology is a vast and intricate metaphysical network that connects and at the same time preserves as fundamentally integral the absolute transcendence of the divine nature, the threefold incarnate economies of the second person of the Trinity, and the natural (created) composition of the corporeal human being. On this score Maximus' thinking is on a par with that of the Cappadocians, whose worldview, as Jaroslav Pelikan once prudently pointed out,

should not be characterized as some sort of doctrine of absolute idealism that rejected the testimony of the senses in the name of the supremacy of spirit. They were critical of a philosophical theology that claimed to be able to 'overleap' the data provided by the senses. For the testimony of the senses was, within its appropriate sphere, both trustworthy and necessary, and it was proper for the human mind to rely on sense experience. It was by the senses, and by the experience of 'the actual world' through the senses, that valid if limited knowledge of that actual world could be acquired. [174]

[174] *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 109.

As we have argued, for Maximus the 'actual world'—with all its complex variegation and continual flux—presents to those with **end p.57** 'eyes' to see a vast book depicting the harmonious web of the whole created economy. [175]

[175] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1128d-1129a).

By virtue of the natural integrity of the dual sensible/intelligible composition of the universe, he can testify to the material order as bearing in itself 'traces' (ἀπηχήματα) of divine majesty 'infused' (ἐγκαταμῖξαι) into its very sensible contours. [176]

[176] *Q.Thal*. 51.22-4 (CCSG 7. 395).

These traces, radiating the magnificence of the highest goodness, are 'capable of conveying directly to God the human intellect which, having held itself above them, comes to transcend all visible phenomena'. [177]

[177] *Q.Thal*. 51.24-7 (CCSG 7. 395).

What is needed is threefold: a recognition of the created and ordered harmony of the sensible/intelligible universe, the reordering and the preservation of the created order of one's own natural faculties, and the proper exercise of those faculties upon the data of revelation in a progressive passage through all created beings—sensible and intelligible—and beyond them to God himself.

Maximus' basis then for viewing the path of revelation as a two-way, divine/human dialectical and pedagogical process is seen to be as much ontological as it is moral. He knows that it is impossible for a person to acquire any kind of divine gift—whether wisdom, knowledge, or faith— by means of natural ability alone. Their conferral is by divine power. [178]

[178] *Q.Thal*. 59.61-4 (CCSG 22. 47).

On the other hand 'it is obvious too', he says, 'that the grace of the Holy Spirit in no way leaves the natural faculty unengaged, but rather—since it has been left unengaged by behaviour contrary to nature—grace begins to make the natural faculty active again, leading it via the use of modes harmonious with nature towards the comprehension of divine things'. [179]

[179] *Q.Thal*. 59.95-9 (CCSG 22. 51).

He adduces two illustrative proofs. The first is christological:

For just as the Word (in a way appropriate to his divinity) performed activities natural to flesh never apart from his intelligently animated flesh, so does the Holy Spirit effect in the saints the knowledge of the mysteries never apart from the faculty which naturally seeks and searches after knowledge. [180]

[180] *Q.Thal*. 59.104-9 (CCSG 22. 51).**end p.58**

The second is physiological:

For just as the eye does not apprehend sensible phenomena without sunlight, so the human mind could never receive spiritual vision without spiritual light. For the one illumines natural sense enabling it to apprehend bodies, while the other illumines the mind for contemplation, bringing it to comprehend realities beyond sense. [181]

[181] *Q.Thal*. 59.116-22 (CCSG 22. 51).

According to their natural, created state, human faculties in their psycho-somatic totality are receptive to divine revelation since they are naturally ordered to respond to the symbolic revelatory data available to them in the sensible and intelligible world. Maximus elaborates upon the structural details of these faculties in *Ambiguum* 21. The five senses are fitted for application to sensible phenomena, though on their own lack the capacity to discern the true nature of the things they sense. [182]

[182] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1248a).

Conversely, the soul also has five faculties, each corresponding to its visible image in the senses. [183]

[183] Eye = mind; ear = reason; nose = irascible faculty (θυμό); tongue = concupiscible faculty (ἐπιθυμία); touch = life.

But since the soul is rational, it is capable of discerning the true nature of the things it apprehends through the bodily senses. One's interaction with particular visible things then is to be governed not by one's sensual experience of them but by the soul's divinely illumined rational account of their true universal nature and function—their *logos*:

If the soul uses the senses properly, discerning by means of its own faculties the manifold inner principles (λόγου) of created beings, and if it succeeds in wisely transmitting to itself the whole visible universe in which God is hidden and proclaimed in silence, then by use of its own free choice it creates a world of spiritual beauty within the understanding. [184]

[184] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1248c).

By using the senses in this way, the soul actually is said to endow them with reason as 'intelligent vehicles of its own faculties'. [185]

[185] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1249bc).

When it joins this transformed sensual operation on the one hand with the practice of virtue on the other, the whole soul/body composite becomes an agent of divine theophany.[186]

[186] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1249c).

This is of course the way it should be. But Maximus never underestimates the radically perverse state of fallen, empirical human existence. Through Adam's fall all these natural faculties **end p.59** have become disordered. Instead of the mind (νου) acting as the leading (ἡγεμονικό) influence in a descending *taxis* of mind, reason, and sense, there has come about instead through the soul's abandonment of the natural course and its deliberate sensual inclination towards matter 'a complete absorption of the intellectual power in sense and in sense knowledge'.[187]

[187] Sherwood (trans. and notes), *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, the Four Centuries on Charity* (ACW 21, New York, and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1955), 64.

Maximus' whole epistemology and doctrine of divine revelation is therefore articulated within a context in which the Christian must necessarily and continually be engaged in an ascetic struggle to reorder his own chaotic state. The key to achieving divine knowledge is found in a middle course between two tempting extremes: accession to the sensual and bodily realm on the one hand, and outright hatred for it on the other.[188]

[188] *Car*. 1.6-8 (PG 90. 961cd); 3.8-9 (PG 90. 1020ab).

To that end, and drawing upon the distilled wisdom of the patristic monastic traditions, Maximus praises a partnership (συζυγία) between soul and flesh modelled variously on the relationships between master and servant, husband and wife, and Christ and the Church—as depicted in the New Testament *Haustafeln*. The body with its senses is to be the soul's tool or instrument (ὄργανον) for comprehending the magnificence of visible things. It is to be the means of manifesting externally through practical deeds the invisible glory of the virtuous soul. It is to be active in 'symbolically engraving the hidden nature of intelligible things on the external contours of visible things'.[189]

[189] *Q.Thal. prol*. 1-18 (CCSG 7. 17).

This is indeed Maximus' assumption in *Ambiguum* 10 which is nothing less than an involved, elaborate apology on the necessity of practical ascetic struggle (πραξι) in the Christian *diabasis* through the sensible and intelligible worlds to God.[190]

[190] Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 33-4.

Extending the insights of Vittorio Croce on Maximus' theological method,[191]

[191] *Tradizione e ricerca. Il metodo teologico di san Massimo il Confessore* (Milan, 1974), summarized by Aidan Nichols in *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 24-63.

Blowers has convincingly argued that the notion of *diabasis* constitutes 'an integrating leitmotif of Maximus' entire hermeneutics'.[192]

[192] *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 100.

He shows that while the Confessor uses a whole range of **end p.60** compounds of the verb βαίνειν (ἀνα—, δια—, μετα—, ἐπανα—) to express the dynamism inherent to spiritual progress, the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* feature a more concentrated and consistent use of the compound διαβαίνειν—διάβασι . Blowers conjectures that the reason for this lies in the fact that the latter pair

convey for him both a sense of *transcendence*—in keeping with the need to 'pass over,' or to 'ascend beyond,' sensible objects and the passions which they can spark—and yet also a crucial sense of *continuity*, namely, the necessity of first 'passing through' or 'penetrating' sensible objects en route to the intelligible and spiritual truth that inheres, by grace, in those sensible things. [193]

[193] Ibid., 97.

Maximus explicitly bases the need for *diabasis* not on some kind of anti-material worldview but on the Word's incarnation and subsequent ascension in the flesh to the right hand of the Father. The human passage through the created order to God is a participation in Christ's own exodus and passage through the same. In *Chapters on Theology* 2.18, a paragraph noted for its roots in Origen, [194]

[194] Von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 561.

Maximus presents a summary of this spiritual *anabasis* to God in which we see set together the whole range of verbal prefixes just mentioned. Taking as his starting point the scriptural phrases 'from strength to strength' (Ps. 83: 8) and 'from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3: 18), Maximus likens the necessity of lifting one's soul and mind in prayer from human to divine realities to the necessity of continual *progress* (προκοπή) in the practice of the virtues, *advancement* (ἐπανάβασι) in the spiritual knowledge of contemplation, and *transferral* (μετάβασι) from the letter of Scripture to the spirit. 'In this way,' he says,

the mind will be able to follow him who 'passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God' (Heb. 4: 14), who is everywhere and who has passed through (διεληλυθότι) all things in the economy on our behalf, so that following him, we also may pass through (διέλθωμεν) all things with him, and may come to be with him (πρὸ αὐτὸν), [195]

[195] The use of the preposition πρό by the Fathers—notably Origen and Maximus—reflects its very deliberate use in John's Gospel where it signifies the unique theological proximity of the Word/Son with God the Father.

if, that is, we perceive him not according to the limitations of his economic condescension, but according to the majestic splendour of his natural infinitude. [196]

[196] *Th.Oec*. 2.18 (PG 90. 1133ab).**end p.61**

Returning to *Ambiguum* 10, in which Maximus' terminology appears somewhat more fluid, the question had obviously been raised in connection with the passage from Gregory Nazianzen's panegyric on St Athanasius[197] whether it was possible, given Gregory's omission of any mention of πρακτική, to 'pass over' the 'cloud or veil' of matter and the fleshly realm by reason and contemplation alone without ascetic struggle. [198]

[198] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1105c-1108a).

In part of his response Maximus reiterates the saints' teaching that ascetic struggle in itself cannot create virtue. It does nevertheless *manifest* it, [199]

[199] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1109b).

and it is to this revelatory character of *praxis* as a necessary, visible effect of the soul's participation in God that Maximus repeatedly returns in his elucidations on the question. The saints, for example, know that forbidden pleasure is sensually aroused. The solution to its eradication is not, as one given to pure intellectualism might have it, the total elimination of sense. Rather,

when therefore they perceived that the soul, when moved contrary to nature through the mediation of flesh towards matter, is clothed with the 'earthly form' (1 Cor. 15: 45-9), the saints were disposed to appropriate the flesh in a seemly way to God through the mediation rather of the soul moved naturally towards God, adorning the flesh as far as possible with divine splendours through the ascetic pursuit of virtue. [200]

[200] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1112cd).

Many scholars have observed the close relation between the practical and contemplative dimensions in Maximus' ascetic theology and its background in the renowned hermit Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399). [201]

[201] M. Viller, 'Aux sources de la spiritualité de S. Maxime. Les oeuvres d'Évagre le Pontique', *Revere d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 11 (1930), 156-84, 239-68, 331-6; von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 330-8 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 331-9); Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 236-48; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 355-76; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 133-6; Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 451-57; Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (Early Church Fathers, London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 35-8.

In Evagrius, ascetic struggle (πρα ξι , πρακτική) represents the first phase in an ascending triad of spiritual development that progresses through contemplation (θεωρία, γνω σι φυσική) to mystical knowledge of the Trinity (θεολογία). [202]

[202] Evag. *Prak*. 1.1-2 (SC 171. 498).

The three stages reflect the fundamental revelatory **end p.62** and epistemological structure—one we have already outlined and seen as common to the patristic mystical tradition: purification from defiling attachments, contemplative engagement with the world of God's economy, and finally doxological participation in the mysterious communion of the holy Trinity. Whether or not Evagrius advocated the eventual abandonment of the preliminary stages as one ascends the spiritual ladder remains a bone of scholarly contention. [203]

[203] See the arguments dealt with by Gabriel Bunge, 'Origenismus-Gnostizismus: Zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrios Pontikos', *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986), 24-54; id., 'The "Spiritual Prayer": On the Trinitarian Mysticism of Evagrius of Pontus', *Monastic Studies* 17 (1987), 191-208.

It is clear, however, that Maximus—who likewise articulates a three-stage spiritual advancement that begins with *praxis*, moves to *theoria*, and is consummated in *theologia* [204]

[204] *Car*. 1.86 (PG 90. 980c); 1.94 (PG 90. 981bc); 4.47 (PG 90. 1057c); *Th.Oec*. 1.37-9 (PG 90. 1097c); 1.51-7 (PG 90. 1101c-1104c). See further Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 332-68; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 133-45.

—espouses the full and mutual co-inherence of *praxis* and *theoria*. The *vita practica* is not simply preparatory. One does not leave behind commandment-keeping and ascetic discipline and the practice of suffering love for one's enemies as though such inherently corporeal and social factors per se get in the way of the true business of the Christian life. Rather it is the case, as Larchet asserts, that *praxis* forms 'the indispensable and permanent complement' of *theoria*. [205]

[205] *La divinisation de l'homme*, 453.

Or as Maximus himself puts it, 'he who seeks the Lord through contemplation without ascetic struggle (χωρὶ πράξεω) shall not find him'. [206]

[206] *Q.Thal*. 48.151-3 (CCSG 7. 339).

To be sure, the one leads to, implies, and qualifies the other, so that he can speak in a single breath of γνῶσι ἐμπρακτο and πρᾶξι ἐνσοφο ,[207]

[207] *Amb.Th. prol*. (PG 91. 1032a).

or else define *praxis* as θεωρία ἐνεργουμένη and *theoria* as πρᾶξι μυσταγωγουμένη.[208]

[208] *Q.Thal*. 63.392-3 (CCSG 22. 171).

In another passage he is unequivocal:

In my view, ascetic practice (πρᾶξι) and contemplation (θεωρία) mutually cohere (συνεχομένα) in one another, and the one is never separated from the other. On the contrary, ascetic practice shows forth through conduct the knowledge derived from contemplation, while contemplation no less displays rational virtue fortified by practice.[209]

[209] *Q.Thal* 58.64-9 (CCSG 22. 31).**end p.63**

The implications of this conviction for both one's bodily senses and the entire sensible world become more apparent a little further on in the same treatise:

It is impossible for the mind to cross over (διαβῆναι) to intelligible realities, despite their connatural relation, without contemplating intermediary sensible things, but it is also absolutely impossible for contemplation to take place without sense (which is naturally akin to sensible things) being joined with the mind.[210]

[210] *Q.Thal*. 58.111-15 (CCSG 22. 33).

Before we end this first chapter, we ought finally to point out that the mutual co-inherence of *praxis* and *theoria* in no way upsets the necessary hierarchical *taxis* or gradation between them that corresponds to the ontological, epistemological, and eschatological priority of intelligible over sensible, *apophasis* over *kataphasis*, soul over body, spirit over letter. In the progressive ascent of the spiritual life, these corporeal entities 'are not to be eliminated as impure, but to be transcended as insufficient'.[211]

[211] Vittorio Croce, quoted in Nichols, *Byzantine Gospel*, 38.

The mortification of the flesh, brought about by ascetic participation in the cross of Christ, finds its true purpose in the resurrection of the intellect in contemplation.[212]

[212] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1145b).

One 'must first be lifted up to God' and only then, once the soul's whole desire has been extended to him alone, 'descend to look into created beings and regard each one in terms of its own nature, and, through them, again be drawn up by contemplative knowledge to their creator'.[213]

[213] *QD* 64.16-22 (CCSG 10. 50).

Only thus can material realities be emptied of their obscurative, divisive character and reintegrated as the transparent vehicles of God's transcendent glory. We could do no better than to conclude by affirming with Blowers that for Maximus the path to 'authentic revelation' involves 'a process not of extreme spiritualization but of a *transfiguration* in which material realities disclose their created fullness κατὰ χριστὸν'.[214]

[214] *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 255. **end p.64**

2 Corporeality and the Cosmos

'What of vile dust?' the preacher said.
Methought the whole world woke,
The dead stone lived beneath my foot,
And my whole body spoke. [1]

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *The Praise of Dust*; in id., *Stories, Essays, and Poems* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), 311.

Why did God create the universe? How can it 'be', yet not be God, who alone 'is'? How can its material dimension, whose existence is marked by perpetual movement and flux, its continual becoming something that it wasn't before, be said to possess any 'being' at all? These questions, with which we come to the heart of all metaphysics, lead us to study the ontological status and function Maximus accords corporeality in the cosmic order. We shall undertake it primarily by way of an examination of his great anti-Origenist treatise, the seventh of the earlier *Ambigua ad Iohannem*.

While scholars have rightly recognized its importance as a cosmological treatise, we shall see that *Ambiguum* 7 is first of all a treatise about the human body. The drawing of an analogous correspondence between the ordered universe and the human body was commonplace throughout Greek antiquity. In the Platonic philosophical tradition, in which Plato's speculation about the mythical construction of the universe by the embodiment of a living creature endowed with soul and reason fuelled the intellectual imagination, [2]

[2] *Timaeus* 30b.

'the relation between body and soul was a microcosm of the vexed problem of the relation between God and the universe'. [3]

[3] Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 74.

Far from representing a perspective alien to Christian thought, Käsemann has shown how in the New Testament 'the cosmos is primarily viewed by Paul under an anthropological aspect, because the fate of the world is in fact end p.65 decided in the human sphere'. [4]

[4] 'On Paul's Anthropology', 23.

Later, St Athanasius cites the 'Greek philosophers' who speak of the cosmos as 'a great body' (σω̃μα μέγα), and, he adds, 'rightly so'. [5]

[5] Ath. *Inc*. 41.5 (SC 199. 412).

In adopting this analogy, St Maximus therefore stands within a long intellectual and religious tradition common to East and West in which to think of the human body 'is to think of something that is…a key to understanding the cosmos itself'. [6]

[6] Andrew Louth, 'The Body in Western Catholic Christianity', in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, 112.

Concurrently, Maximus—like Paul and Athanasius—differs from Plato in his discernment that the 'mystery' of bodily existence is inextricably linked to the 'mystery' of Christ, God the embodied Word. The divine Word's assumption in time of a human body endowed with a rational soul constitutes for the Confessor a unique paradigm of cosmic proportions, and therefore, as we have already seen in Chapter 1, he is able to view *sub specie aeternitatis* the entire cosmos—a composite unity of intelligible and sensible reality—as the incarnate, theophanic fulfilment of God the Word's will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment'. [7]

[7] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1084d).

We may well ask before we begin whether this notion of God's embodiment in the cosmos is so conceptually and structurally distinct from certain forms of pantheism and modern immanentism. At least one of the charges brought against Origenism, then and

now, is its eventual disparagement of the material and historical order as evil and God's own subjection to some kind of external necessity (ἀνάγκη). Does Maximus, in his refutation of Origenism, go to the other extreme and posit a form of anti-dualist cosmic monism? Is the universe simply God's material self-extension? These are important questions, and so in preparation for our analysis it will be helpful to conduct a brief survey of sixth-century Origenism. There it will become clear that in at least some quarters, the derogatory label 'Origenist' implied, in the opinion of the labelling party, a too-uncritical reception of certain aspects of non-Christian Greek philosophy that were thought to compromise the ontological distinction between God and creation, the integrity of the material order, and the wise practice of the ascetic life. From the evidence at hand in Maximus' works it is not unreasonable to conjecture that whatever the so-called 'Origenism' was that he confronted, it shared with earlier tendencies an over-rigorous **end p.66** intellectualism that marginalized the body and the material world, an intellectualism that for Maximus' own monastic readership 'was still inducing the monks to pin their hopes for true spiritual stability on a future intellectual union with God in a state completely disconnected from time and matter'. [8]

[8] Paul Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of "Perpetual Progress"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), 158.

While we have concurred in our introduction with von Balthasar that the great themes which passed from the likes of Plato and Plotinus into Christianity were on the whole 'world-affirming', it appears that Origenism, precisely on account of its retention of an insufficiently modified Platonic cosmology, was perceived equally by Maximus and his forebears to threaten the great Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection.

ORIGENISM, METAPHYSICS, AND THE BODY

We begin tracing the metaphysical structure of the cosmos in Maximus' theological vision by providing a cursory sketch of the sixth-century Origenist movement. A full account would entail a formidable essay in its own right, and indeed has been the subject of a number of detailed studies. [9]

[9] Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Patristica Sorbonensia 5, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962); Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 145-62; Brian E. Daley, 'What Did "Origenism" Mean in the Sixth Century?', in Dorival and Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta,* 627-38.

It will suffice here simply to index a few lines of thought that will allow us better to appreciate Maximus' own engagement with what appears to be a problematic monastic trend of his time, and to see it as not simply an intellectualist debate, but a concern—at once philosophical and theological—impinging upon significant aspects of monastic, and thus Christian practice.

In an essay [10]

[10] Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 145-62.

anticipating her novel reconstruction of the Origenist debate, [11]

[11] *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Elizabeth Clark, drawing to a large extent on research findings of Antoine Guillaumont [12]

[12] *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica'.*

and Jon Dechow, [13]

[13] 'Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1975). **end p.67**

argued that in the Origenist controversy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the true concerns of anti-Origenist polemic were less theological than they were anthropological. The real nub of Origenism, she says, was not Origen's subordinationism, but Evagrius''anti-iconic theology'. [14]

[14] 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 149. See also Georges Florovsky, 'Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy', *Church History* 19 (1950), 77-96, who raises the question of Maximus' relation to Origen's christological ambivalence.

Hand in hand with this anthropological 'iconoclasm', Clark argues, goes the 'ascetic assault on the human body'. [15]

[15] 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 154.

The major line of Epiphanius' denunciation of Origen, like those of Theophilus of Alexandria and Jerome, 'pertains to issues of materiality as they manifest themselves in discussions of the body and of allegorical exegesis'. [16]

[16] Ibid., 155.

None of this is without implication for 'Origenism' in the sixth century, since Justinian makes judicious use of florilegia, circulating by the second quarter of the sixth century, [17]

[17] Grillmeier ii. ii. 386.

composed of anti-Origenian material from Epiphanius, Theophilus, and Jerome. [18]

[18] Grillmeier ii. ii. 400.

More recently Brian Daley has argued that while the fourth-century crisis may well have concerned issues surrounding the materiality of the body, 'sources for the sixth-century controversy suggest that the center of debate had significantly shifted: what was really at stake in the struggle seems to have been Christology—the unity and symmetry of the person of Christ as an intelligent, embodied human creature and as "one of the Holy Trinity"…'. [19]

[19] 'What Did "Origenism" Mean in the Sixth Century?', 629.

Interestingly, however, Daley makes this claim within the context of his conviction, in which he agrees with Manlio Simonetti, [20]

[20] 'Origenism was above all a way of living the Christian religion, in which great faith was joined with an equally great freedom of thought, and an ardent mystical impulse constantly came down to earth in terms characteristic of a Platonically stamped intellectualism.' From 'La controversia origeniana: caratteri e significato', *Augustinianum* 26 (1986), 29, quoted by Daley, 'What Did "Origenism" Mean in the Sixth Century?', 637.

that sixth-century Origenism 'signified more a style of religious thinking, and perhaps a set of priorities in living the monastic life, than it did adherence to a body of doctrine which could find its inspiration in the works of Origen'. [21]

[21] 'What Did "Origenism" Mean in the Sixth Century?', 628.

In this respect, both Daley **end p.68** and Clark share the view that whatever 'Origenism' was, it was not confined to the ivory towers of ecclesiastical politics, but spelled pastoral crisis at the very grass-roots of monastic life.

These scholarly suggestions may be illuminated by an extract from the monastic biographer Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, penned around 560. [22]

[22] English translation by R. M. Price and John Binns, *Cyril of Scythopolis: Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (CS 114, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

Alongside the more rhetorically charged comments of Barsanuphius (d. *c*.540),[23]

[23] *Ep*. 600 in François Neyt and Paula de Angelis-Noah (eds. and trans.), *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza. Correspondance*, ii (SC 451, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 804-10.

Cyril's work remains one of the main sources for gauging reactions to 'Origenism' in Palestine in the first half of the sixth century.[24]

[24] Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 333.

In the exchange between Cyril and Abba Cyriacus of the Laura of Souka we learn about the appeal to Gregory Nazianzen's commendation of philosophical speculation[25]

[25] The infamous passage is from Greg.Naz. *Or*. 27.10.17-22 (SC 250. 96-8).

made by monks apparently taken with the doctrines of the pre-existence of the soul and a universal *apokatastasis*.[26]

[26] It is not the biblical idea of an ἀποκατάστασι πάντων per se that was thought to be wrong (cf. Acts 3: 21), but the inclusion in it of (finally restored) demons and Satan himself.

It is worth relating the exchange at length. We begin where the younger Cyril asks Cyriacus about a group of monks who had only recently (*c*.514) been expelled from the New Laura:

'Father, what are the views they advocate? They themselves affirm that the doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are indifferent and without danger, citing the words of St Gregory, "Philosophize about the world, matter, the soul, the good and evil rational natures, the Resurrection and the Passion of Christ, for in these matters hitting on the truth is not without profit and error is without danger." '

The elder replied in the following words: 'The doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are not indifferent and without danger, but dangerous, harmful, and blasphemous. In order to convince you, I shall try to expose their multifarious impiety in a few words. They deny that Christ is one of the Trinity. They say that our resurrection bodies pass to total destruction, and Christ's first of all. They say that the Holy Trinity did not create the world and that at the restoration all rational beings, even demons, will be **end p.69** able to create aeons. They say that our bodies will be raised ethereal and spherical at the resurrection, and they assert that even the body of the Lord was raised in this form. They say that we shall be equal to Christ at the restoration.

What hell blurted out these doctrines? They have not learned from the God who spoke through the prophets and apostles—perish the thought—but they have revived these abominable and impious doctrines from Pythagoras and Plato, from Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus. I am amazed what vain and futile labours they have expended on such harmful and laborious vanities, and how in this way they have armed their tongues against piety. Should they not rather have praised and glorified brotherly love, hospitality, virginity, care of the poor, psalmody, all-night vigils, and tears of compunction? Should they not be disciplining the body by fasts, ascending to God in prayer, making this life a rehearsal for death, rather than mediating such sophistries?'[27]

[27] Price and Binns, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 252-4.

Given its hostility and late date of composition, it is difficult to know how reliable such an exchange is for historical reconstruction. For included among those expelled from the Laura as 'Origenist' leaders was allegedly the monk Leontius of Byzantium, whose doctrine has been demonstrated to bear little resemblance with that explicitly condemned here.[28]

[28] See Brian Daley, 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', *JTS NS* 27 (1976), 333-69.

Nevertheless, it shows that at least one of the main concerns about monks reckoned Origenist was intellectualism—a preoccupation with speculative philosophy and the apparent neglect of the practice of prayer, humility, and brotherly charity. Joseph Patrich has suggested that likely candidates for such a 'movement' may have included οἱ λογιώτεροι—'the more educated', and that the dissidents referred to above by Cyril as οἱ γεννάδε —'the distinguished ones'—had probably received classical education on account of their higher socio-economic status. [29]

[29] Patrich, *Sabas*, 333.

Regarding the charge of intellectualism, a monk like Leontius could easily have been vulnerable since as a champion of strict Chalcedonianism he operated within a field of rational and analytical philosophical discourse in which, as Daley writes, 'the common tools of debate had become far more technical and academic than they had been for Athanasius and his contemporaries'. [30]

[30] Brian Daley, ' "A Richer Union": Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ', *Studia Patristica* 24 (1993), 244.

It almost seems that the very end p.70 doing of what in our day might be called 'philosophical theology' was reckoned by some to be an 'Origenist' pursuit. Moreover, we note also the association of Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus with the earlier non-Christian Greek philosophers—an association that had already been made explicit by Justinian in 543. [31]

[31] Grillmeier ii. ii. 391.

It is to Justinian's edicts of 543 and 553 that we now turn. Once again, while we cannot deduce from them any definitive and lasting categories as to what did or did not constitute Origenism in other contexts, they do serve to illustrate that certain heretical tenets of the mid-sixth century arising from speculative theories of Neoplatonist philosophy were reckoned wrong on account of their incompatibility with the Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. In comparing the edicts from the two occasions, Grillmeier speculates that those of 553 reflect an even more focused attention on issues of corporeality and christology. [32]

[32] Grillmeier ii. ii. 407.

Among the nine canons of 543 we find rejected the doctrines of the pre-existence of souls, their surfeit and banishment into bodies, the differentiation between Christ (as a pre-existent soul) and the Logos, the spherical form of resurrected bodies, and the eventual restoration of all things, including demons. These are again included in the fifteen canons of 553, but with a few notable additions. [33]

[33] Straub, *ACO* iv. i. 248-9.

First, in the second anathema, there is the mention of the doctrine of a *henad*:

If anyone says that the origin of all rational beings was incorporeal and immaterial intelligences without any number or names, so that they formed a *henad* on account of the sameness of essence (*ousia*), of power (*dynamis*) and of activity (*energeia*) and on account of their union with the God-Logos and knowledge; that they became sated with the divine vision (κόρον δὲ αὐτοὺ λαβ ε῀ιν τη θεία θεωρία) and turned to what was worse, each corresponding to its inclination to it, and assumed lighter or denser bodies and were labelled with names with respect to the fact that the difference of names exists, like bodies and powers too, from above; and that for this reason some

became the cherubim, others seraphim, and again others principalities, powers, dominions, thrones, angels and all the other heavenly orders which exist and were so named, let him be anathema.
This rejection of the *henad* is important for us since it is precisely the problem under fire from Maximus in *Ambiguum* 7. Canons 10, 11, and 14 are also of interest for us: **end p.71**

If anyone says that the Lord's resurrected body is an ethereal and spherical body, that the other resurrected bodies too will be like this, that moreover the Lord will put off his own body first and in a similar way the nature of all the bodies will return to nothing, let him be anathema.
If anyone says that the coming judgement means the annihilation of all bodies, and at the end of the fable immaterial nature stays and in the future nothing of matter will continue to exist, but only the pure *nous*, let him be anathema.
If anyone says that there will be a single *henad* of all rational beings (πάντων τῶν λογικῶν ἑνάς μία) through the annulment of *hypostases* and numbers with the bodies, and that the end of the worlds and the laying aside of bodies and the abolition of names follow the knowledge relating to the rational beings, and that there will be sameness of knowledge as of *hypostases* and that in the fabricated *apokatastasis* there will be only pure intelligences, as they exist in their foolishly invented pre-existence, let him be anathema.

These paragraphs make evident how closely woven christological and anthropological concerns are with a cosmology in which the world is considered not simply in static metaphysical terms, but protologically and teleologically as well. One wonders whether the characteristically Justinian soteriological emphasis on the flesh of Christ who is 'one of the Trinity' was simply a political gambit to unite the Empire in the Chalcedonian definition, or whether in fact it represents a studied response on the basis of his insight into the implications of 'Origenist' cosmology. What can or cannot be said of Christ as a true, bodily human being has immediate import both for what can or cannot be said of our bodies and the whole material order. The doctrine of a fall from an original *henad*—a primeval unity of rational, incorporeal beings, and with it the implicit understanding that the end of all beings is constituted as a return and restoration to that pristine, incorporeal state, can be seen to impinge upon the doctrine of the incarnation and especially of the resurrection—of Christ's body in particular and of human bodies in general. Yet bodies are not just corpses, but persons, or at least identifiably linked to created, subjective, human individuality. The swallowing up of all individuality and differentiation, when understood as the annihilation of hypostases, numbers, and bodies, condemned in Canon 14, was seen to amount to a defective doctrine of creation and, concurrently, a defective doctrine of the incarnation.

Our point in this summary overview has not been to defend or implicate either Origen or Evagrius with respect to the errors that **end p.72** came to be associated with their names. Henri Crouzel has pointed out the noticeable 'gap' separating Origen of the third century and the Origenism of the sixth, and more recently Gabriel Bunge has shown that Guillaumont's characterization of sixth-century Origenism as 'Evagrian' is far from certain.[34]

[34] On Origen, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 169-79; M. J. Edwards, 'Origen No Gnostic; or, On the Corporeality of Man and Body and Soul',

JTS NS 43 (1992), 23-37. On Evagrius, especially in response to claims that he espouses an intellectualist, iconoclastic, or non-affective ascetic theology, see Gabriel Bunge, 'The "Spiritual Prayer": On the Trinitarian Mysticism of Evagrius of Pontus', *Monastic Studies* 17 (1987), 191-208; id., *Paternité spirituelle: La Gnose chrétienne chez Évagre le Pontique* (Spiritualité Orientale 61, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1994); Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery*, 216-21; also Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Melania the Elder and the Origenist Controversy: The Status of the Body in a Late-Ancient Debate', in John Petruccione (ed.), *Nova et vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 117-27.

Our intention rather at this stage has been to observe what in the mid-sixth century were the doctrines considered actual and imminent threats to the confession of the Church, to its worship, and, in specific connection to Maximus' milieu, to the faithful living of the monastic vocation. The Origenism Maximus takes to task cannot be identified from these sixth-century sources, nor can it be reliably reconstructed from his writings. Indeed, as Tollefsen has argued, his arguments 'do not seem to be developed from a close examination of Neoplatonic texts, rather he seems to argue against Neoplatonic positions that are constructed to be the typical targets of Christian criticism'. [35]

[35] Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 68.

Still, it is apparent Maximus feels keenly the threat of an actual philosophical doctrine. In one or two points it merits from him a head-to-head negation, yet on the whole he tends rather to revisit and reconstruct it at a deeper, sub-structural level. We have already seen in Chapter 1 that Maximus is a monk-theologian who fully understands and wills to retain the essential and beneficial elements in the great Alexandrian's exegetical approach. [36]

[36] Sherwood, *Annotated Date-List*, 3.

He is rightly named a 'definite insider' to the Origenian hermeneutical tradition. [37]

[37] Paul Blowers, 'The Anagogical Imagination: Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenianian Hermeneutics', in Dorival and Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta*, 649.

Here above all we shall see how the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, radically and consistently applied, emerges as the fundamental solution to the **end p.73** faulty Origenist metaphysic. But this will be no battle of 'theology' against 'philosophy'. Maximus' doctrine of creation is itself a creative, enduring synthesis of patristic theology and the Neoplatonic, and especially Proclean, doctrine of participation, mediated to him via Dionysius the Areopagite. [38]

[38] Eric D. Perl, 'Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, and Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor' (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1991). Perl tends to ally Maximus with a view that far too baldly states the identification of God and creation. See also his essay, 'Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena', in Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (eds.), *Eriugena: East and West. Papers for the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenean Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame 18-20 October 1991* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 253-70.

Given what has been said about the integrity of the material order in Neoplatonism and Origenism, it will be interesting to see how the body fares in Maximus' refutation.

AMBIGUUM AD IOHANNEM 7: A DYNAMIC ONTOLOGY

Ambiguum 7 arguably ranks among the most important treatises of Maximus' early philosophical theology. Alongside *Ambiguum* 15, it spells out in detail the main themes in his refutation of Origenism and provides the foundation for elements that were to become central in the later christological debates. Halfway through the whole treatise comes the phrase that dominates our study of the place of the body in Maximus' total

theological vision: 'For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.' This sentence suggests that the mystery of divine incarnation, enacted constitutively in Christ, is in fact the paradigmatic foundation of a far-reaching cosmic mystery. The phrase 'in all things' (ἐν πα῀σιν) signals the utterly universal scope of God's ultimate aim to be embodied in his creation. Yet the treatise begins with a question from Gregory Nazianzen regarding the mysterious quality of bodily human existence. How does Maximus achieve this shift from a personal existential conundrum to a universal cosmology?

Part of the problem Maximus was facing was not simply the content of the Origenists' doctrines, but their use of Fathers revered for their authority as justification for their position. As we saw from the extract from Cyril of Scythopolis above, and learn also from the letters of Barsanuphius and John in

end p.74 Gaza,[39]

[39] *Ep*. 604 in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza. Correspondance* (SC 451. 815-24). Brian Daley provides a useful summary of the relevant exchanges in 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', 366-8.

Origenist monks had long been appealing to the authority of divines of the calibre of Gregory Nazianzen to bolster their doctrine of the pre-existence of souls. Maximus views his task in part as controlled by the need to vindicate the Fathers associated.[40]

[40] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1089c).

On this occasion the difficult text before him is from the Nazianzen's 14th Oration, *On Love for the Poor*,[41]

[41] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 14.7 (PG 35. 865c).

a primary passage in Gregory's anthropology. Here it follows in the relevant context, marked in italics:

[T]his wretched and low and faithless body: how I have been hooked up with it I do not know, nor how I am an image of God yet blended with clay. It makes war when healthy yet is vexed when warred upon. As a fellow servant I love it, and as an enemy I spurn it. As a fetter I flee it, and as a joint heir I am ashamed of it. I strive to weaken it, and have nothing else to use as a co-worker to attain the best—knowing for what I was made and that I must ascend to God through my actions.

[If] I spare it as a co-worker, then I have no way to flee its insurrection, or to avoid falling from God, weighed down by its fetters which draw me down or hold me to the ground.[42]

[42] Maximus treats this sentence in *Amb.Io*. 6 (PG 91. 1065b-1068c).

It is a gracious enemy and a treacherous friend. O what union and estrangement! What I am afraid of, I treat with respect, and what I love, I have feared. Before I make war [on it] I reconcile myself [to it], and before I make peace [with it] I set myself apart [from it]. *What is the wisdom surrounding me? What is this great mystery? Is it that God wills that we who are a portion of God and slipped down from above—in our struggle and battle with the body—that we should ever look to him, and that the weakness joined [to us] should serve to train our dignity, lest exalted and lifted up on account of our high status we despise the Creator*[43]

[43] This is the passage treated in *Amb.Io*. 7. Note how the question posed by Gregory continues.

—that we should know that we are at the same time both the greatest and the lowest, earthly and heavenly, transitory and immortal, inheritors of light and fire—or of darkness, depending which way we incline? Such is our mixture and this is its reason, as it appears to me at least: that when we exalt ourselves because of the image, we may be

humbled because of the dust. Hence let him who wishes contemplate these matters, and we shall join him for spiritual exercises at a more opportune time. [44]

[44] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 14.7 (PG 35. 865a-865d).**end p.75**

Throughout this passage we hear expressed an ambivalence towards the body and bodily conditions common to the philosophical and ascetic traditions of Late Antiquity, both in the East and West. [45]

[45] See D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), 66-79; John M. Dillon, 'Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism', in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80-7; Ware, ' "My Helper and My Enemy" ', 90-110; Louth, 'The Body in Western Catholic Christianity', 111-29.

Its essential features combine both Platonic and Pauline themes, echoing on the one hand Socrates' cool stance towards 'the foolishness of the body', [46]

[46] Plato *Phaedo* 67a.

and on the other the Apostle's impassioned cry, 'who will rescue me from this body of death?' [47]

[47] Romans 7: 24.

Baffled by the paradox of human sublimity and humility, Gregory is wondering why, if they were created for a heavenly life of union with God, human beings were given a body. [48]

[48] Anna-Stina Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 21, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1981), 41.

His own answer is that the body keeps man humble, guarding him from the pride and presumption to which he is vulnerable on account of his kinship with the divine. Only in this lowly condition is man capable of recognizing his true identity and so of achieving his God-given destiny. To that end, one can take Gregory's rhetorical question, 'What is this mystery?', one he poses in suggestive contexts elsewhere, [49]

[49] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 7.23 (SC 405. 238); 38.13 (SC 358. 134); 39.13 (SC 358. 176); 45.9 (PG 36. 636a).

and see in it the construction of a bridge between material creation and its eventual deification.

But for Maximus' readers, the problem lies with the phrase at the heart of the passage in which human beings are said to be 'a portion of God' (μοιραν Θεου) and 'slipped down from above' (ἄνωθεν ρεύσαντα). Taken bare, both ideas sit comfortably enough with Origen's conjecture that the corporeal cosmos is the result of a primordial fall of souls, occasioned by 'satiety' and a 'cooling' in attention, from a pristine state of divine perfection and preoccupation with the good. [50]

[50] Or. *Princ*. 2.6.3 (SC 252. 314-16); 2.8.3 (SC 252. 342-8); 2.9.2 (SC 252. 354-6).

As such one could say that they contribute to what Ugo Bianchi calls the conceptual and objective connection **end p.76** drawn by Origen between the soul's fall and its 'terrestrial incorporation'. [51]

[51] Ugo Bianchi, 'Some Reflections on the Ontological Implications of Man's Terrestrial Corporeity according to Origen', in Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (eds.), *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies, University of Manchester September 7th-11th, 1981* (Rome: Edizioni Dell'Ateneo, 1985), 157. Crouzel has opposed Bianchi on this point in *Origen*, 215.

Thus the text from Gregory, as Sherwood has observed, 'not only is patient of an Origenist interpretation, but positively invites it'. [52]

[52] *The Earlier Ambigua*, 73.

Maximus' opening words, in which he summarizes the interpretation influenced by what he calls 'pagan teachings', confirm this suggestion:

According to their opinion there was once a single entity (ενάδα) of rational beings, by virtue of which we were connatural with God and had our 'dwelling' (cf. John 14: 2) and foundation in him. Then they add that when motion (*kinesis*) came about—as a result of which these rational beings were dispersed in varying degrees—God envisaged the creation (*genesis*) of this corporeal world for the sake of binding them in bodies as a punishment for their former sins. This is what they propose the teacher is suggesting in the words above. [53]

[53] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1069a).

We would be moving into the realm of speculation were we to ask what concrete signs in monastic life such an interpretation might entail. Yet it is important to keep in mind the social setting from which this difficulty emerges, since it ties our interpretation of Maximus' cosmic ontology to the concrete context of his audience—John the Bishop of Cyzicus and his religious community—to whom he directs his anti-Origenist confutation. They would have been especially acquainted with conditions in which, confronted by their own and others' corporeality through ascetic struggle, exasperation with bodily life could become all the more acute. They would have known the temptation common to all ascetic and mystical traditions to leave behind practical asceticism in order to attain the traditional monastic ideal: a pure, undistracted form of intellectual contemplation. Yet the collective wisdom accumulated over the centuries in orthodox Christian ascetic traditions maintained that both the practical and spiritual goals of ascetic life demand that the monk neither pamper nor denigrate his body, but train it as a disciplined instrument and co-worker of the soul. In his popular monastic manual Maximus gives voice to precisely this conviction when, appealing to the words of St Paul, he writes, **end p.77** 'No one', says the Apostle, 'hates his own flesh' (Eph. 5: 29), of course, but 'mortifies it and makes it his slave' (1 Cor. 9: 27), allowing it no more than 'food and clothing' (1 Tim. 6: 8) and these only as they are necessary for life. So in this way one loves it without passion, rears it as an associate in divine things and takes care of it only with those things that satisfy its needs. [54]

[54] *Car*. 3.9 (PG 90. 1020b).

The evidence adduced earlier suggests that Origenism manifested itself at the social level as an intellectual elitism, a presumptious preoccupation with speculative spirituality at the expense of lived assimilation to God through rigorous ascesis. The dangers inherent in such a one-sided existence include spiritual overload and stagnation. Monastic sapiential literature abounds with diagnostic remedies to cope with the danger of *akedia*—listlessness, despondency or boredom. [55]

[55] See Pierre Miquel, 'Akèdia', in id., *Lexique du Désert. Étude de quelques mots-clés du vocabulaire monastique grec ancien* (Spiritualité Orientale 44, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1986), 19-35; Gabriel Bunge, *Akèdia. La doctrine spirituelle d'Évagre le Pontique sur l'acédie* (Spiritualité Orientale 52, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1991).

In addition, then, to the theoretical problems inherent in the Origenist position, there remained in Maximus' context the 'immediate and practical threat of "satiety", namely, the kind of spiritual surfeit, the "peaking out" as it were, that the monks were prone to experience in their daily ascetic struggle'. [56]

[56] Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of "Perpetual Progress" ', 155.

We shall not be surprised, then, when Maximus moves from refuting the doctrine of a *henad* to offering a positive interpretation of Gregory's claim that we are 'a portion of God' with practical implications for the spiritual life. We cannot here discuss the whole of Maximus' lengthy argument in systematic detail. Sherwood has already done so admirably in his unrivalled analysis of *Ambiguum* 7. [57]

[57] See also Riou, *Le Monde et L'Église*, 45-71.

Instead we shall strive to preserve the flow of Maximus' argument in commentary form, along the way isolating primary sub-structures that underlie and give shape to his vision of corporeality in the cosmos. The treatise runs according to a loosely definable structure, roughly divided into two parts. In the first part, [58]

[58] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1068d-1089d).

Maximus does three things. First, he refutes the *henad* doctrine by arguing that perfection is a future state and, as such, yet to be realized in its full actuality. [59]

[59] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1068d-1077b).

Secondly, he offers two **end p.78** consecutive interpretations to explain how we are 'a portion of God': by virtue of creation, and by virtue of deification. In the first, [60]

[60] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1077c-1081c).

we are 'a portion of God' in that we are created by God and so participate in being. It is in this context that Maximus presents his teaching on the relation between the one divine Logos and the diverse *logoi* of creation. In the second, [61]

[61] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1081d-1085a).

we are 'a portion of God' in so far as, through a life of virtue, we come to participate in 'well-being'. Thirdly, Maximus refutes the Origenist notion of 'satiety' by underlining the stability of the final state of endless progression in the good. [62]

[62] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1085c-1089d).

The three sections, it can be seen, correspond somewhat to Maximus' tripartite scheme of being, well-being, and eternal well-being.

In the second part of the treatise, [63]

[63] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1092a-1101c).

Maximus offers a closer exegetical reading of the passage in Gregory in which he treats the problem of bodily human existence, the relation between image and likeness, soul and body, *logos* and *tropos*, and the final hope of resurrection.

Keeping this structure in mind, let us begin by looking at the refutation of the *henad* doctrine. As Maximus has it, the Origenist schema places *genesis* as the third ontological 'moment' in a series that begins in monadic unity, disperses through motion (*kinesis*), and eventuates punitively in corporeal generation. The nature of motion, diversity, and their cause had long been the object of philosophical scrutiny. It is a problem indirectly related to the question about the origin of evil, for when considered 'from below', motion, mutability, differentiation, and evil go hand in hand. [64]

[64] Justinian had implicitly accused Origenism of dualism when he ascribed to Origen Manichaean errors: 'For he [Origen] was educated in the mythologies of the Hellenes and was interested in spreading them; he pretended to explain the divine scriptures, but in this manner mixed his own pernicious teaching in the documents of the holy scriptures; he introduced the pagan and Manichaean error and the Arian madness, so that he could give to them what the holy scriptures could not understand precisely' (from Justinian's *Edictum contra Origenum* quoted in Grillmeier ii. ii. 393-4).

It was a question that in the fourth century had been addressed by Athanasius when he asserted the inherent goodness of creation and denied of evil any positive or substantial

status. The recurrence of strongly dualistic heresies throughout the patristic period and beyond necessitated frequent recourse to this basic orthodox **end p.79** affirmation.[65]

[65] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1332a): 'The being (τὸ εἶναι) of evil is marked by non-existence' (cf. PG 91. 1328a). See further Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, ii. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 216-26.

The problem remained, however, of how to account for evil without subsuming created diversity into God himself (monism), or giving it a positive source outside of God (dualism).

Only further on in *Ambiguum* 42 does Maximus—on christological grounds—outrightly reject the punitive character of corporeal generation inherent in the Origenist position as 'Manichaean'.[66]

[66] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1328a; 1332a-1333a).

Nothing created is evil. Nevertheless, his understanding of a double creation—in which he follows a tradition reaching back to the two Gregories,[67]

[67] Greg.Nyss. *Opif*. 16 (PG 44. 185b); Greg.Naz. *Or*. 6.22 (SC 405. 174-8); 38.11 (SC 358. 124-6). Evagrius,[68]

[68] Evag. *Mel*. 6.192-236 (M. Parmentier, 'Evagrius of Pontus'"Letter to Melania" I', in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Forms of Devotion: Conversion, Worship, Spirituality, and Asceticism* (New York and London: Garland, 1999), 282-3).

Origen,[69]

[69] Or. *Gen*. 1.13 (SC 7. 56-64).

Clement,**[70]** Philo,[71]

[71] *Legum allegoria* 1.12. Commenting on Genesis 2: 7, Philo writes: 'There are two kinds of humanity: one is heavenly, the other earthly. The heavenly man, being made in the image of God, is completely without a share in corruptible and terrestrial substance. But the earthly man was constructed out of diverse matter, which [Moses] calls dust. That is why he says that the heavenly man has not been moulded, but has been stamped with the image of God, whereas the earthly man is a moulded figure (πλάσμα) of the Artificer, but not his offspring.' Trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo*, i (LCL, London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), 166. See also Philo *De opificio mundi* 46 (Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, i. 106).

and perhaps Plato himself[72]

[72] *Timaeus* 69bc.

—allows him also to think of Adam's fully sensual material incorporation simultaneously as a punitive and an assistive divine act. Adam's creation as a composite being formed from the dust of the earth and the breath of God (Gen. 2: 7) and his fall are simultaneous, so much so that for Maximus any actual, empirical prelapsarian existence is purely hypothetical. No sooner is man given being out of non-being than he transgresses the divine command, declining from the good. His natural passage from non-being into perfection or well-being is short-circuited by sin. We shall take this up further in due course.

Here however he first concentrates on the structure rather than the substance of the *henad* doctrine in which the negative motion of **end p.80** fall follows after a state of non-motion—after a state of perfect participation in God. In classic Neoplatonist metaphysics, within the context of seeking to resolve the age-old problem of the relation between the one and the many, the basic structure of motion (and thus of all intelligible reality) was conceived in terms of an ontological cycle of remaining (*mone*), procession (*proodos*), and return (*epistrophe*). In proceeding from its cause—an ontological, not a temporal or spatial movement—an effect at the same time continues to *remain* in its cause. This remaining constitutes a thing's identity with its cause; procession constitutes its difference

from its cause. The overcoming of difference is achieved by a thing's *return* to its cause. Together these three aspects constitute the existence of any thing. Procession and return are in fact the same motion viewed respectively from the aspect of the cause and from the aspect of the effect. [73]

[73] 'Procession and reversion together constitute a single movement, the diastole-systole which is the life of the universe.' E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 219. See further Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 94-5.

The whole process is summarized by Proclus in his *Elements of Theology* with the triadic formula: 'every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it'. [74]

[74] …μένειν πᾶν ἐν τῷ αἰτίῳ καὶ προϊέναι ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν πρὸς αὐτό (*prop*. 35, in Dodds, *Proclus: Elements of Theology*, 38).

As noted above, Maximus was no doubt familiar with Proclus' metaphysical framework through his thorough acquaintance with the work of Dionysius. He would have seen how the three stages of the Neoplatonic schema dovetailed with the Origenist account: remaining equals *henad*, procession equals fall and (material) creation, and return equals the ascent involved in the spiritual life and deification. The problems associated with this position are threefold. First, a *henad* implies a pre-temporal, eternal creaturely coexistence with God. On the basis of the biblical title *pantocrator* for God, Origen had understood the eternality of the world (τὰ πάντα) to be correlative to the eternality of God's sovereignty. [75]

[75] 'As no one can be a father without having a son, nor a master without possessing a servant, so even God cannot be called omnipotent unless there exist those over whom he may exercise his power; and therefore, that God may be shown to be almighty, it is necessary that all things should exist' (Or. *Princ*. 1.2.10 (SC 252. 132)). This holds for the intelligible world, yet Origen did not hold the material universe to be eternal, for several times he clearly asserts that it was made by God out of nothing (e.g. Or. *Princ*. 2.1.4 (SC 252. 240-4); 4.4.6-7 (SC 268. 414-18)). **end p.81**

Athanasius had clarified and corrected Origen by subordinating the secondary, contingent (economic) relation of creator-creation to the primary, eternal (theological) relation of Father-Son. [76]

[76] 'For creatures not to exist does not lessen the maker; for he has the power of framing them whenever he wills. But for the offspring not to be always with the Father does lessen the perfection of the Father's essence. Thus his works were framed when he willed, through his Word; but the Son is ever the proper offspring of the Father's essence' (Ath. *Ar*. 1.29 (PG 26. 72d-73a)).

By positing the actual pre-existence of rational creatures, the doctrine of a *henad* reduces the act of creation to the addition of individual accidents, rather than seeing it as the creation of actual essences. This Maximus perceives and rejects with clarity elsewhere:

Some say that created things eternally coexist with God, which is impossible. For how can what is utterly limited eternally coexist with the wholly infinite? Or how are they really creatures if they are co-eternal with the creator? But this is the theory of the Greeks, who in no way admit God as the creator of the essences, but only of qualities (ποιοτήτων). But we who know God as the Almighty (τὸν παντοδύναμον) affirm that he is the creator not of qualities but of essences endowed with qualities. And if this is true, creatures do not eternally coexist with God. [77]

[77] *Car*. 4.6 (PG 90. 1049a); also 3.28 (PG 90. 1025b); 4.1-5 (PG 90. 1048b-d).

Secondly, the doctrine of a *henad* implies that God brought the material world into being not freely, but by necessity. If creation is the necessary result of a fall from a state of unitary simplicity, that is, a necessary consequence of evil, then it cannot be the free and

good creative act of God. Once again we turn elsewhere to find Maximus' assertion to the contrary:

In no way do we assert that souls pre-exist bodies, or that bodies were introduced as an addition to souls as a punishment for the evil committed beforehand by incorporeal beings. We do not suppose that evil alone is likely to have been the cause of the pre-eminent miracle of visible phenomena through which God, heralded in silence, can be known.[78]

[78] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1328a); also *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1329c-1332b); and *DP* (PG 91. 293bc), where Maximus rejects any thought of God being creator by necessity of his goodness.

Thirdly, the doctrine of a fall from an already existing state of perfection, a fall occasioned by 'satiety', implies a never-ending cycle of instability in which creation's ontological status is necessarily susceptible to corruption and dissolution. For if embodiment and material diversity are the result of opposition—**end p.82** an opposition that arose even within a state of *mone*[79]

[79] While the word *stasis*, a synonym of *mone*, is not used in its technical sense in *Amb.Io*. 7 (Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 93 n. 44; 95), its meaning is implied in the long list of scriptural citations in PG 91. 1072d-1073a. Its first appearance as a technical term within the triad *genesis-kinesis-stasis* occurs in *Amb.Io*. 15 (PG 91. 1217d-1221b).

and perfect union with God, then creation remains ontologically and fundamentally flawed. Gregory of Nyssa, to whom Maximus is so indebted in this treatise and in his anthropology in general, had been sensitive to precisely this problem in Origen's doctrine in the fourth century, and against it pitted his doctrine of 'perpetual progress'—the never-ending progression in the good.[80]

[80] See Ronald E. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship Between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's* De Vita Moysis (Patristic Monograph Series 2, Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975).

But if this is a false sequence, what in Maximus' eyes is the solution? The Neoplatonic category of procession clearly corresponds with God's creation of the world—its procession from non-being into being. But where does the fall fit in? And where is perfection to be located? What was the nature of Adam's prelapsarian condition? If it was truly perfect, how did he fall? If not, that is, if there was no such thing as an historically actual prelapsarian perfect state, what for Maximus *is* the ontological status of this material universe in its present, fallen, historical condition? Did God create a flawed world? What is the relation between the rational creature's procession from God into being (creation), its unnatural movement towards non-being (fall), and its progress in and attainment of the ultimate good (deification)?

Maximus begins his refutation of the existence of a *henad* by what is initially recognizable as an exercise in Aristotelian logic. The custom of determining the end or purpose of a thing by reference to its beginning or cause was ancient and well-established.[81]

[81] *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.13 (SC 172. 124); Or. *Princ.* 1.6.2 (SC 252. 196-200); 3.6.1-3 (SC 268. 234-42); Bas. *Hex.* 11.7 (SC 160. 242).

Yet because of the fall, direct access to the beginning of human nature is impossible. The fall has ruled out the Platonic ideal of recollecting or returning directly to one's origins. Instead, one must learn one's beginning by turning to the end: 'No longer, after the transgression, is the end revealed from the beginning, but the beginning from the end.'[82]

[82] *Q.Thal.* 59.280-1 (CCSG 22. 63).

Asserting what will become an **end p.83** oft-repeated dictum, 'nothing moving has [yet] come to rest' (οὐδὲν κινούμενον ἔστη), [83]

[83] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1069b).

Maximus therefore directs his attention not to the origin, but to the goal (*telos*) of motion, the 'ultimate object of desire' (το ἔσχατον ὀρεκτόν):

Now if the divine is immovable (ἀκίνητον) (since it fills all), and everything that has being from non-being is movable (κινητόν) (since it is continually impelled towards some cause), and nothing moving has come to rest (since it has not yet found rest for its capacity for appetitive motion in the ultimate object of its desire, for nothing else is apt to stop what is naturally impelled except the appearance of that object of desire), then nothing in motion has come to rest. [84]

[84] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1069b).

The main argument against the primordial existence of a *henad* lies in the fact that perfect stability—the attainment of the ultimate object of desire—remains an as-yet unrealized reality. Here Maximus begins to lay down the parameters of what we have called his 'dynamic ontology'. For Aristotle, a proper analysis of a given reality involves asking about its four basic causes: the final cause—the *telos* 'for the sake of which' (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα) a thing exists; the formal cause—the *logos* of being (ὁ λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) which characterizes the course on which a thing travels; the material cause—that from which a thing is made; and the motive cause—the principle (ἀρχή) of motion, the cause which sets a thing on its course. [85]

[85] Aristotle, *Physica* 2. 3. 194b; 2. 7. 198ab; *De generatione animalium* 1. 715a.

Maximus makes partial use of these categories as part and parcel of his scientific analysis of reality. Just as in Aristotle's teleological view of nature one can only account for reality by knowing 'that for the sake of which' it exists, so with Maximus the cosmos is viewed not as a static, metaphysical unit, but in terms of its goal (*telos*) or purpose (*skopos*), [86]

[86] The term *skopos*, usually translated as 'purpose', 'plan', or 'goal', is of great importance in Maximus as providing the specific terms by which God brings creation to its *telos*. The word can also mean 'plot' or 'theme', as among later Neoplatonist commentators it was customary to assign at the outset a single *skopos* to each philosophical work in the effort to unify that work and harmonize varying philosophical sources.

which for the Confessor is christologically determined. The beginning and end of creation are identical in so far as all creation comes 'from God' and is naturally oriented towards him as its goal. But the beginning is also unlike the end, in that the goal of creation is deification. At least in his early years, Origen viewed beginning and end as unitive: 'when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of **end p.84** things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed'. [87]

[87] Or. *Princ.* 3.6.3 (SC 268. 240).

Within such a worldview, not only is all motion and difference problematic; the incarnation cannot accomplish anything new, nor achieve any real goal, other than help towards the restoration of equilibrium. But for Maximus, created human nature—and with it, the whole cosmos—is defined by a dynamic trajectory considered equally from ontological, eschatological, and moral perspectives. This trajectory has its beginning (ἀρχή) in God its sole cause (αἰτία), who, as we shall see, brings it into 'being' from non-

being and sets it upon the path that leads via 'well-being' towards its goal in 'eternal well-being', that is, in union with himself, the 'ultimate object of desire'. Maximus hereby combines the traditional Neoplatonic cycle of procession and return—one he often expresses with the Dionysian image of the spokes of a wheel proceeding from and converging upon a central point [88]

[88] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081c); *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos 154.3-7); *Th.Oec.* 2.4 (PG 90. 1125d-1128a); cf. Dion.Ar. *De div.nom.* 2.5; 5.6.

—with what could be considered a more historical, horizontal, developmental understanding of motion as the passage of the soul from *genesis* to *stasis* in God. [89]

[89] Paul Plass has studied this modification as it relates to Maximus' conception of time in 'Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor', *The Thomist* 44 (1980), 259-77, and 'Moving Rest in Maximus the Confessor', *Classica et mediaevalia* 35 (1984), 177-90.

Procession, by which an effect is differentiated from its cause, coincides with the human creature's *genesis* or emergence by the will of God from non-being into being. Return, through which 'the effect is constituted as an entity by its turning towards the cause and by the reception of its quality from it', [90]

[90] Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 95.

coincides with the freely willed life of progression towards *stasis* or union with God. This return is stretched out into a movement at once graciously caused by God and freely self-caused, since it is fundamental to the nature of the soul to be self-moved and autonomously oriented towards God. The soul's freedom, which at the same time constitutes its distinction from and relation to God, is entirely natural. Yet creaturely dependence is not denied when the human soul is designated αὐθυπόστατο —'self-subsistent'. [91]

[91] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1345d); *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91. 1052ab); *Ep.* 7 (PG 91. 436d-437b). That the soul is self-constituted is axiomatic in Proclus' theological metaphysics (*prop.* 189, Dodds, *Proclus: Elements of Theology*, 164). **end p.85**

Since procession and return indicate ontologically, not chronologically distinct movements, the procession of the soul into being is, if not immediately interrupted by fall, identical with its return to its cause. It is thus the function of the triads *genesis*, *kinesis*, *stasis* and being, well-being, eternal-well-being to offset the equilibrium inherent in the procession-return cycle by introducing a linear, developmental movement in which divine grace and human free will are fully cooperative.

Consequently the need for a reappraisal of the Origenist metaphysic is at once moral and ontological. If rational beings once had a secure 'foundation' and 'abode', [92]

[92] The terms ἵδρυσι and μονή are frequently paired.

yet subsequently fell from that stable state, then given the same circumstances, Maximus concludes, they will 'necessarily (ἐξ ἀνάγκη) experience the same alterations in position *ad infinitum*'. [93]

[93] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1069c).

That necessary ontological instability cannot but trigger a moral angst. 'What could be more pitiable than that rational beings should be impelled in this way and neither possess nor hope for an immutable foundation (βάσι) whereby they may be anchored in the good?' [94]

[94] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1069c).

Here Maximus adumbrates what he will say later by identifying the Origenist problem as a dilemma about freedom. For Origen, free will involves an act of rational power by which one moves oneself towards one of two opposites: good or evil. [95]

[95] See Or. *Princ.* 3.1.1-22 (SC 268. 16-140), which is preserved in Greek.

In order for the choice of the good to be considered free, one must also be able to choose its opposite, namely evil. [96]

[96] See Or. *Princ.* 2.8.3 (SC 252. 342-8).

Despite Origen's abhorrence of determinism and his true concern to preserve both God's transcendence and human freedom, by confusing ontological with moral stability both God and the cosmos get stuck between the dialectical vicissitudes of good and evil. On the one hand, evil becomes itself the necessary cause of this present world. On the other hand, the good ends up being desired not for its own sake, but on account of the experience of evil. [97]

[97] Later Maximus would call false the assumption that choice involves plurality, or that plurality necessarily involves opposition. Only acts of willing that correspond to the seat of will in nature are truly free. 'Freedom of choice not merely does not belong to the perfection of freedom…."Choice" is by no means an obligatory condition of freedom. God wills and acts in perfect freedom, but he does not waver and he does not choose. Choice—προαίρεσι —which is properly "preference,"…presupposes bifurcation and vagueness—the incompleteness and unsteadiness of the will. Only a sinful and feeble will wavers and chooses.' Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 234-5.

Maximus will show how, paradoxically, creaturely **end p.86** freedom is maintained precisely by the soul's being naturally determined by God.

There are, moreover, solid biblical grounds for refuting the idea of an actual primordial state of perfection. Quite early on in his refutation of the *henad* Maximus quotes a range of passages that place perfection not at the beginning of humanity's existence, but at its end:

The saints Moses, David, and Paul also bear witness to this fact, as well as Christ their master. First there is Moses when he recounted that our forefather did not eat from 'the tree of life' (Gen. 2: 9, 17); and elsewhere, 'for you have not yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord our God is giving you' (Deut. 12: 9). Then David says, 'Crying out, I will be satisfied when your glory appears' (Ps. 16: 15), and 'my soul thirsts for the strength of the living God; when shall I go and see the face of God?' (Ps. 41: 2). And Paul writes to the Philippians, 'if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead; not that I have obtained it or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Jesus Christ took hold of me' (Phil. 3: 11-12). And to the Hebrews he writes, 'for whoever enters into his rest also rests from his own works, just as God rested from his' (Heb. 4: 10). And again in the same letter he confirms that no one received what was promised (Heb. 11: 39). Then there is, 'come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11: 28). [98]

[98] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072d-1073a).

Whatever Adam's newly created condition was, it is here shown to be a developmental stage or state of becoming.

Having put the problem into perspective with this focus upon the final cause, the Confessor continues his argument by addressing the relation between *genesis* and *kinesis*. His argument progresses as a kind of consistent application of the Christian doctrine of

creation *ex nihilo*. *Genesis* must be the ontological precondition of *kinesis* in both intelligible and sensible beings,[99]

[99] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072a).

because at the most fundamental level there are only two basic realms: the uncreated, and the created[100]

[100] *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1304d).

—and entities of the latter only have being by means of *genesis*. Over and against the essential continuum between the one and the many advanced in Neoplatonist emanatism,

Maximus presses this ontological divide with force. God as 'self-caused' (αὐταίτιο) is 'unmade, without **end p.87** beginning, and immovable'.[101]

[101] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072c).

'To be *telos*, perfection and impassibility belongs to God alone, for he alone is immutable, complete, and impassible'.[102]

[102] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1073b).

He is that end 'for the sake of which (οὗ ἕνεκεν) all things exist, but itself *is* for the sake of nothing'.[103]

[103] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072c). We find this formula also in *Q.Thal.* 60.36-7 (CCSG 22. 75). For its possible origin in Evagrius, see Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua,* 34.

On the other hand, all created beings are subject to motion—interpreted not as a general state of random flux (which would be contrary to nature), but as a movement directed toward a goal. Thus, perhaps citing the Aristotelian commentators, Maximus says, 'they call this motion a "natural capacity" (δύναμιν φυσικὴν) that hastens towards its proper

goal, or "passibility" (πάθο) which, as motion from one thing to another, has impassibility as its goal, or else "effective activity" (ἐνέργειαν δραστικὴν) whose goal is self-perfection'.[104]

[104] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072b).

Nothing created is its own end, or is self-perfect, or impassible.[105]

[105] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072c).

'It belongs to creatures to be moved towards the-end-without-beginning, and there to cease their activity in just such a perfect end and to be acted upon (παθεῖν).'[106]

[106] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1073b).

This inherent passibility, Maximus explains, is not the passibility associated with deviance (τροπὴ) or the corruption of capacity, but the natural and fundamental condition of creatures which have been brought into being from non-being.[107]

[107] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1073b).

Motion, then, is proper to the nature of rational beings, not because they have fallen, but because they have been created by God.[108]

[108] 'The source (ἀρχὴ) of every natural motion is the *genesis* of things that are moved. And the source of the *genesis* of things that are moved is God, since he is the creator of nature

(γενεσιουργό)' (*Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91. 1217c)). According to von Balthasar *kinesis* is for Maximus an 'ontological expression of created existence' (*Kosmische Liturgie*, 136; ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 141).

The mystery of creation places the world at a fundamental ontological distance from God, such that 'the interval (τὸ μέσον) between uncreate and creatures is total, and as infinite as the difference'.[109]

[109] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1077a).

Yet it also places the world in an ontological relation to him—not as an extension of his own ineffable being, but as fundamentally derivative of and dependent upon it. Maximus uses **end p.88** terminology clearly reflecting Proclus' doctrine of participation when he speaks of creation as issuing 'from God' (ἐκ Θεου̑), [110]

[110] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1072a, 1080ab); 10 (PG 91. 1180a, 1188b); 15 (PG 91. 1217d); 41 (PG 91. 1312b). Cf. Romans 11: 36.

who 'imparts himself' (ἑαυτὸν…μεταδου̑ναι) to beings in the form of being itself. [111]

[111] *Amb.Io.* 35 (PG 91. 1289a).

Dionysius the Areopagite had spoken of this when he referred to God as 'the being of beings'. [112]

[112] τὸ εἰ̑ναι τω̑ν ὀντω̑ν. *De div.nom.* 5.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, i. 183.8-9).

In Maximus' construal of the vision, God is creation's source of being, its means of being, and its goal of being, its 'beginning (ἀρχή), middle (μεσότη), and end (τέλο)'. [113]

[113] *Th.Oec.* 1.10 (PG 90. 1085d-1088a).

But mere 'being' is not creation's goal, but 'eternal well-being': union with God—deification. Maximus links the now-reformed metaphysical triad *genesis*, *kinesis*, and *telos* to its counterpart, being, well-being, and eternal well-being.

Since, therefore, rational beings are created, they are always moving. They have been moving naturally from the beginning by virtue of being, and move voluntarily (κατὰ γνώμην) towards their goal by virtue of well-being. For the end of motion for those being moved consists in eternal well-being, just as the beginning is being itself, which is God, who is the giver of being and the gracious giver of well-being—since he is beginning and end. For the simple fact of our motion derives from him as the beginning, and the nature of our motion is defined by him as the goal. [114]

[114] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1073c). Cf. *Q.Thal* 60.117-20 (CCSG 22. 79): 'For it was necessary for the one who is truly creator by nature of the *ousia* of created beings also to become the author by grace of the deification of the beings he has created, so that the giver of well-being might appear also as the gracious giver of eternal well-being.'

The involvement of the human creature in this process is far from mechanical. It leads him in an escalating series of ecstatic experiences through which all perception—intelligible and sensible—becomes completely overwhelmed by the embrace of God, his true goal, [115]

[115] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1073cd).

'like darkness illuminated by light, or iron completely penetrated by fire'. [116]

[116] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1076a).

Perhaps because Origen's cosmology derived to a large extent from his meditations on the eschatological vision portrayed in 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28, [117]

[117] See, for example, Or. *Princ.* 3.6.1-6 (SC 268. 234-50). end p.89

Maximus too [118]

[118] Sherwood (*Earlier Ambigua*, 89) notes that at two points in *Ambiguum* 7 'Maximus introduces and uses in an opposite sense those very texts which had served Origen, and after him of course the Origenists, as substantiation of their error.' This represents the second.

reconsiders human destiny as ecstasy under the rubric of 'subjection' (ἡ ὑποταγή). [119]

[119] This meditation reflects clear indebtedness to Dionysius' discussion of ecstasy in *De div.nom.* 4.13, where, reflecting on St Paul's words in Galatians 2: 20 and 2 Corinthians 5: 13, he writes: 'This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved. This is

shown in the providence lavished by the superior on the subordinate. It is shown in the regard for one another demonstrated by those of equal status. And it is shown by the subordinates in their divine return toward what is higher. This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2: 20). Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself "for God" (2 Cor. 5: 13), possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.' See also Andrew Louth, 'St. Denys the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor: A Question of Influence', *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993), 171.

Just as the Saviour subjected himself to the Father in Gethsemane with his prayer 'not as I will, but as you will' (Matt. 26: 39), and as the Apostle Paul, disowning himself, could say that 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2: 20), so free will (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) will become 'freely and completely surrendered to God, submitting to a state of being ruled by refraining from that which wills anything contrary to what God wills'. [120]

[120] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1076b).

Far from entailing the abolition of free will, however, there is instead established a solid ontological foundation for freedom, so that, 'whence being comes to us, thence also we may desire to be moved'. [121]

[121] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1076b).

It will be the case, says Maximus, that
like an imprint conforming to its original seal, 'the image will ascend to the archetype', [122]

[122] The phrase is from Greg.Naz. *Or* 28.17 (SC 250. 134).

and will have neither the desire nor the capacity to move elsewhere. Or to put it more forthrightly, it will not be able to will otherwise, since it will have taken hold of the divine activity, or rather have become God by deification, utterly delighted to the full in being outside (τῇ ἐκστάσει) those things that are and are perceived to be naturally its own. This is due to the abundant and overwhelming grace of the Spirit that shows God alone to be active, so that there is in all only one activity of God and the worthy, [123]

[123] Fifteen years later during the Monothelete controversy, Maximus had to clarify his meaning on this and other occasions where he spoke of one will or energy. See *Or.dom.* 114 (CCSG 23. 33); *Opusc.* 1 (PG 91. 33a).

or rather of God alone, inasmuch as he, in a way entirely befitting his goodness, interpenetrates entirely those worthy of God. [124]

[124] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1076c). **end p.90**

In the same stroke Maximus excludes the possibility of 'satiety' or any deviation in the final, perfect state. All reality—intelligible and sensible—will be 'enveloped in God by his ineffable appearance and presence'. [125]

[125] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1077a).

Here ends Maximus' initial refutation of the *henad*, after which he begins his interpretation of the two phrases from Gregory—'a portion of God' and 'slipped down from above'. In Gregory, the two appear as synonymous. For Maximus, however, they refer to two entirely different realities. To be a portion of God is to be a being that participates in God through having been created by him and so receiving being from him in accordance with a pre-existing *logos*. Or again, to be a portion of God is to participate in God through the practice of virtue. But to 'slip down' is to fall from this *logos*, the divinely intended and natural course of created human nature. [126]

[126] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081c).

To 'slip down' involves the irrational abandonment of one's own beginning, a fall incurring serious ramifications in both the moral and ontological spheres:

He is rightly said to have 'slipped down from above' who did not move towards his own beginning and cause according to which (καθ’ἣν), by which (ἐφ’ᾗ), and for which (δι’ἣν) he was made. He is thus in an unstable gyration and fearful disorder of soul and body. And even though his cause remains fixed, he brings about his own defection by his voluntary inclination towards what is worse…. He has willingly exchanged what is better for what is worse: being for non-being. [127]

[127] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91, 1084d-1085a).

In its natural state the human soul is compelled towards being. [128]

[128] Maximus says this much with specific reference to the human nature of Christ in *DP* (PG 91. 297a-300a).

Any deviation (τροπή) [129]

[129] There are two levels at which Maximus speaks of τροπή: one (pejoratively) as a moral failure, and the other (neutrally) as an innate capacity—related to our composite condition—to suffer change. In the first case: 'Deviance (ἡ τροπή) is a movement contrary to nature suggesting the failure to obtain the cause. For deviance, in my estimation, is nothing other than a decline in and a falling from our natural activities.' *Ep.* 6 (PG 91. 432ab). In the second: 'Every creature is a composite of essence (οὐσία) and accident (συμβεβηκότο) and in constant need of divine providence since it is not free from mutability (τροπῆ).' *Car.* 4.9 (PG 90. 1049b). Also *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91. 1220c); Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 193-6.

of the soul from the trajectory from being via well-being to eternal well-being constitutes a progressive fall away from being. While the cosmic principle of divine providence **end p.91** protects all creatures from ultimate dissolution into total non-being, the same principle can when violated become a *logos* of judgement—not by any change in the principle itself, but in relation to the movement towards eternal ill-being of those who set themselves against God's instituted designs for human nature. [130]

[130] See Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 230-1.

For Maximus, preserving the distinction between creation as procession from non-being into being on the one hand, and fall from being into ill-being on the other hand, is paramount. Yet in post-lapsarian human existence, the two are contemporaneous. At the very moment (ἅμα) of its coming-into-being, the human soul falls from its cause. [131]

[131] *Q.Thal.* 59.262 (CCSG 22. 61); *Q.Thal.* 61.10-15 (CCSG 22. 85).

What to the modern reader may appear as a certain pessimism on Maximus' part here must be acknowledged to be at the same time both theologically realistic, true to his traditional sources, and consistent with his Neoplatonic metaphysical framework. By means of Adam's fall human nature has collectively failed to attain the fullness of its natural, created condition in which it would be simultaneously united with and distinct from its creator. As a result, material, historical existence is experienced by fallen humanity as fragmented and distant from its creator, and so in some way as less than created.

The claim that we are 'a portion of God', however, tells quite a different story: it is that prior, ontological norm from which we have noticeably 'slipped' in our empirical existence. Maximus' first lengthy analysis of the phrase provides the setting for him to introduce the doctrine of the *logoi*, a 'complex, polysemantic, and rich concept which goes back to the early theology of the Apologists…'. [132]

[132] Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century,* 223.

In Maximus' cosmology the *logoi* are God's original ideas or intentions for creation: the unifying, ordering, determinative and defining principles in accordance with which God institutes created natures. A thing's being—what it is—is determined by its *logos,* by what God intends it to be. As constitutive of relation and definition, the *logoi* define the essential qualities and purpose of creaturely being and at the same time disclose the divine Word and Wisdom operative within the cosmic economy. Quoting the Areopagite, Maximus calls them 'predeterminations' (προορισμοί) or 'divine intentions' **end p.92** (θ ϵ῀ ια

θελήματα) according to which God has created and knows the things that are.[133]

[133] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1085ab). Cf. Dion.Ar. *De div.nom.* 5.8 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, i. 188.6-10): 'We say that the pre-existent *logoi* are paradigms.… Theology calls them predeterminations, divine and good intentions that are determinative and creative for beings. According to them the transcendent one predetermined everything that is and brought it into being.'

Together with Maximus' use of the Neoplatonist philosophical logic of union and distinction, the doctrine of the *logoi* demonstrates how created nature can at the same time participate in God at the level of being, well-being, and eternal being without there ever being a confusion of essences between God and creation, or between different species of creatures.

This section of *Ambiguum* 7 presents a crucial argument for us at this point, for it relates directly to the structure of deification, and carries over into Maximus' remarks on the nature and function of the body in relation to the soul. He begins with a syntactically awkward passage in which he says that while one must acknowledge the difference between individual *logoi* on the one hand, and the difference between all the *logoi* and God the Logos on the other, they are one in an indivisible and unconfused way because the *logoi* have their source in the Logos, and thus, ultimately, also their teleological consummation in him. The strongly biblical provenance of Maximus' thinking is striking:

Who—in knowing that God by his Word and Wisdom brought into being from non-being the things that are (Wisd. 9: 1-2), if he should wisely direct the contemplative faculty of the soul to the infinite difference and diversity of natural beings, and by rational enquiry distinguish conceptually the principle according to which they were created—who [I say,] will not see that the one Word, while being distinguished from created things by an indivisible difference on account of their unconfused particularity

with themselves and one another (διὰ τὴν αὐτῶν πρὸ ἄλληλά τε καὶ ἑαυτὰ ἀσύγχυτον ἰδιότητα), is [in fact] many *logoi*? And again, [who will not see that] the many *logoi* are one Word, who by referring all things to himself exists for himself without confusion, and who is essentially and actually God the Word of God the Father, the beginning and cause of the universe, 'by whom all things were created in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers—all things have been created from him and through him and for him'?[134]

[134] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1077c-1080a). The biblical passage is a conflation of Colossians 1: 16 and Romans 11: 36.

end p.93 The doctrine of the *logoi* articulates the double reality of the simultaneous distinction and relation between God the Logos and the manifold created beings. For every species or generic category of created being—whether visible or invisible, angelic or human—there is a corresponding *logos* or divine rationale that determines its nature and function—determines and qualifies, that is, 'what' that thing is or should be, since it is

in accordance with the respective generic *logoi* that God distributes particular existence through the hierarchy of highest to lowest forms of being.[135]

[135] See Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 100-2.

Maximus states repeatedly that the creation of particular beings takes place 'in accordance with' the *logoi*.[136]

[136] e.g. *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1080a).

As both ontologically and chronologically prior, they 'pre-exist in God'—not as subsistent realities, but as ideas or principles of God's design and intent. All created beings, therefore, participate in God insofar as they have being from him corresponding to the *logoi*. More specifically it can be said, though, that 'every intellectual and rational being, angel or human, by means of the very *logos* according to which it was created—which is in God and with God, is called and is a portion of God, because its *logos* pre-exists in God'.[137]

[137] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1080b).

'Surely then', Maximus affirms, 'if it moves in accordance with its *logos* and comes to be in God,…and if it wills and yearns to attain nothing else in preference to its own origin, then it will not fall away from God, but rather, in straining towards him, actually becomes God and is fittingly said to be a portion of God by its participation (τῷ μετέχειν) in God.'[138]

[138] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1080c).

This argument represents deft work, since by it Maximus does not simply negate the Origenist doctrine of pre-existence, but reworks it, giving sense and scope to material diversity, and situating the ground and goal of creaturely being firmly and immutably in God's eternal purpose. Maximus' logology builds upon the orthodox discernment of difference and relation between God and creation: God's eternity lies at the level of actuality. Creation's eternity, guaranteed by the *logoi*, exists only at the level of potential. Only when God freely creates something from non-being is that potential realized in the form of being (εἶναι).[139]

[139] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081ab); also *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1329c): 'And with respect to those beings whose generation is in harmony with the divine purpose, their essential existence remains—unable to pass from being into non-being. And with respect to those beings whose actual essential existence is unable to pass from being after generation, their *logoi* are permanent and stable, having as their beginning the sole skill of being, from which and for which they exist, and by which they possess the potential to propel themselves stably towards being.'

While **end p.94** the *logos* of human nature does not suffer change or alteration itself, it

determines for human nature a dynamic course whose terminus (πέρα) lies in God. He is its ultimate Sabbath or 'place' of rest.[140]

[140] 'When someone comes to be in God, he will no longer move away from that place, since it is a state surrounded by stillness and calm. Hence God himself is the place of such blessedness for all the worthy, as it is written, "be for me God my protector, a strong place to save me" (Ps. 70: 3).' *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1080d-1081a). See also *Q.Thal.* 61.320-5 (CCSG 22. 103); *Th.Oec.* 2.32.

Every created rational being (λογικό), therefore, is 'a portion of God' by virtue of having its *logos* in God. But this is only half of the argument. There is 'another way' of conceiving Gregory's phrase—structurally identical, yet more explicitly christocentric.[141]

[141] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081c).

Since the Word of God, 'our Lord Jesus Christ, is the substance of all the virtues'—for the virtues are his not attributively as with us, but absolutely—'every person who participates

in virtue by a consistent conduct (καθ' ἕξιν παγίαν) unquestionably participates in God'.[142]

[142] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081d).

This observation leads Maximus into a profound discussion arguably forming the heart of *Ambiguum* 7 in which he outlines the shape of the Christian life in terms of the reciprocal relation between God's incarnation and human nature's deification. In view of the significance of this section with respect to the overall focus of our study, it will be worth attending to in more detail.

IMAGE, LIKENESS, AND THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD

We have already encountered the reworked metaphysical triad—about to re-emerge here in verb form as γίνεται—κινεῖται—ζῇ—connecting the dynamically conceived, divinely purposed course of the *logos* of human nature to the triad of being, well-being, and eternal being. But now the connection is further nuanced with an important and central distinction in Maximus, suggested by the subtle difference between Genesis 1: 26 and Genesis 1: 27, between **end p.95** image and likeness.[143]

[143] Thunberg quotes Disdier, 'Les fondements dogmatiques de la spiritualité de S. Maxime le Confesseur', *Échos d'Orient* 29 (1930), 296-313, to the effect that this distinction lies at the heart of all Maximus' spirituality (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 113). See also Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 47-68, 88-101; Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 151-64.

Having described the movement of the participant in virtue from beginning to end as 'the praiseworthy course' (τὸν ἐπαινετὸν δρόμον), he writes:

By virtue of this course he becomes God, receiving his 'being God' (τὸ θεὸς εἶναι) from God, having deliberately (προαιρέσει) added to the natural goodness of the image the likeness through the virtues—through the natural ascent to and conformity with his own beginning. From this point on there is also fulfilled in him the apostolic word which says, 'for in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17: 28). For he 'comes to be in God' (γίνεται ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) through diligence, having preserved uncorrupt the *logos* pre-existing in God of being. And being activated through the virtues he 'moves in God' (κινεῖται ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) according to the *logos* pre-existing in God of well-being. And he 'lives in God' (ζῇ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) according to the *logos* pre-existing in God of eternal being.[144]

[144] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1084ab).

By weaving into this course the added distinction between image and likeness, Maximus weds ontological considerations to the course of the spiritual life and, almost incidentally, draws the conversation more deeply towards a treatment of the constitutive place of bodily life in the process of deification. It may not be wrong to suggest that this distinction, which holds a prominent place in select lines of the tradition,[145]

[145] This interpretation of Genesis 1: 26-7 can be found in Iren. *Haer.* 5.6.1 (SC 153. 72-80); Clem. *Str.* 2.22 (SC 38. 133); Or. *Princ.* 3.6.1 (SC 268. 234-8); Diad. *Cap.* 89 (SC 5. 149-50); Evag. *Mel.* 12.484-5: 'That which is natural to man, is that man was created in the image of God; what is supernatural is that we come to be in his likeness' (trans. from the Syriac by Parmentier, 'Evagrius of Pontus'"Letter to Melania" I', 289). The distinction is evaluated by Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 120-32.

plays immediately to Maximus' benefit in his concern to address the peculiarly practical problems surrounding Origenist speculative philosophy. His appreciation and

development of the distinction between image and likeness is unique. As we observed in Chapter 1 there exists in Neoplatonic spirituality a concern to restore the beauty of the image of God in the soul so that the soul may be likened to him. [146]

[146] Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.1-7; 1.6.1-9. Plato (*Theaetetus* 176ab) equates the ideal of flight (φυγή) with a process of 'likening [oneself] to God as far as possible (ὁμοίωσι θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν)'.

The Fathers **end p.96** generally follow Origen in saying that only Christ the incarnate Logos *is* the εἰκών τοῦ Θεοῦ (Col. 1: 15), whereas rational beings (λογικοί) are created '*according to* the image of God'—κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ. While for some writers image and likeness appear to be synonymous expressions denoting rational beings' close kinship to God, there is another tradition reaching back to Philo that draws a clear distinction between the two terms. So in Irenaeus we find expressed at one point the thought that only the perfect (τέλειο) human being, a tripartite unity of body, soul, and (divine) spirit, is truly 'in the image and likeness of God'. Carnal man, though retaining the image of God in the 'plasma'—the composite of body and soul—remains imperfect until he receives likeness through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. [147]

[147] Iren. *Haer.* 5.6.1 (SC 153. 72-80); see further Adelin Rousseau, 'Appendix II', in his edition of *Irénée de Lyon. Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique* (SC 406, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 365-71.

Clement of Alexandria, perhaps with Irenaeus in mind, refers to 'some of our own [teachers]' who divide image and likeness into divine gifts conferred in two stages. What is according to the image is given at creation, and what is according to the likeness is given at the future perfection. [148]

[148] Clem. *Str.* 2.22.6-9 (SC 38. 133).

And writing in the mid-fifth century, Diadochus of Photike acknowledges that while all human beings are according to the image of God, only those are according to his likeness who subject their freedom to him through love. [149]

[149] Diad. *Cap.* 4.10-16 (SC 5. 86).

Maximus inherits elements from all these traditions, but we find his conception of the distinction between image and likeness to be all the more developed. This is amply demonstrated in a response from the *Quaestiones et dubia*, where the biblical topos presents a specific occasion for comment:

Why does it say, 'Let us make man in the image and likeness of God' (Gen. 1: 26), but then a little further on it says, 'so God created man, in the image of God he created him' (Gen. 1: 27), omitting the phrase 'according to his likeness'?

To which Maximus replies:

Since God's primary purpose was to make man according to his image and likeness, and 'image' means incorruption, immortality, and invisibility—all of which image the divine, he has appointed these for the soul's possession, having also given it with them the self-governing and freewilling faculty, all of which are images of the essence of God. But **end p.97** 'likeness' is impassibility, gentleness, patience and all the other characteristics of the goodness of God which are indicative of the activity of God.

Thus those things belonging to his essence which display the fact that we are in his image, he has given naturally to the soul. But the other things belonging to the activity of God which indicate likeness to him, these he has left to our self-determining will while he

awaits the perfection of man—if man should somehow make himself like God through the imitation of the divinely fitting characteristics of virtue. That is why, therefore, the divine Scripture omits in the words following these the mention of 'likeness'. [150]

[150] *QD* iii. 1.1-20 (CCSG 10. 170).

All rational creatures are made in God's image, since they participate in God's essence (*ousia*). For Maximus, this is evident in the soul's natural qualities: incorruption, invisibility, and immortality. But the attainment of likeness to God, humanity's goal, is contingent upon participation in his goodness, which is indicative of his activity (*energeia*). This vocation necessarily involves the whole person—mind, soul, and body—in the practical and social virtues: imperturbability, gentleness, patience, and so on. Thunberg has rightly recognized this holism when he points out that likeness to God in Maximus is 'consistently related to the life of virtues and the *vita practica*'. [151]

[151] *Microcosm and Mediator*, 128.

That humanity is created in God's image is natural—it belongs to 'being'. But the acquisition of likeness to God through ascetic struggle, correlated to the attainment of 'well-being', is a gift of grace alone. [152]

[152] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1345d): 'In the beginning man was made in the image of God for the indisputable purpose of being born by the Spirit through free choice, and that he may acquire the likeness which is added to it through the keeping of the divine commandment, so that man himself might be on the one hand a creature of God by nature, and on the other hand a son of God and a god through the Spirit by grace.' Here Maximus does not oppose nature and grace, as he makes clear in *Amb.Io.* 10 where the first and third elements in the triad, being and eternal being, are correlated to the operation of 'God alone', whereas the middle element, well-being, is said to depend on 'our will and movement'. It is well-being that holds the other two together (PG 91. 1116b).

This goal of perfection (likeness, well-being) attained by grace and by the life of virtue presupposes an incorporeal ontological foundation (image, being) by nature. Maximus' thinking on this subject bears some affinity with another passage in Diadochus, in which baptism is said to achieve 'two goods'. The first restores a person immediately to the image of God in which he was made. The second, which presupposes yet 'infinitely surpasses' the first, anticipates the eschatologically perfected conformity to God's likeness through **end p.98** love—'the fulfiment of the law'. [153]

[153] Diad. *Cap.* 89.1-17 (SC 5. 149-50).

Much more could be said. For now we must leave this topic until we treat baptism further in Chapter 5.

Returning then to *Ambiguum* 7, we can appreciate now the significance of Maximus' insistence on the cruciality of the practical life in the fulfilment of humanity's divinely given vocation. Moreover, the attainment of likeness through active participation in the virtues collapses the distance between this world and the next, between time and eternity. Elsewhere Maximus says the same thing of human nature when, by grace, it is united to its *logos*. Ultimately this only occurs at 'the advent of infinite rest', when creatures come to be 'in God'. At that point, all motion related to temporal worldly existence ceases—or rather—reaches its proper goal in 'ever-moving rest'. [154]

[154] See further *Q.Thal.* 65.522-41 (CCSG 22. 283-5).

But here, such a person is said to have already (ἤδη) achieved immobility in God. Already he is 'identical to himself [ie. to his own *logos*] by virtue of the most imperturbable habit'. [155]

[155] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1084b).

Such a person is 'a portion of God: he exists, by virtue of his *logos* of being in God; he is good by virtue of his *logos* of well-being in God. He is God by virtue of his *logos* of eternal being in God.' [156]

[156] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1084b).

Nothing distinctively different from God remains visible in him, for 'he has placed himself completely in God alone, having fashioned and formed God alone in himself entirely'. As we saw in the last chapter, a 'wonderful exchange' has taken place in which three distinct elements are discernible: man has become God, God has become man, and God's deifying power has become bodily manifest and accessible in the deified person himself. It is worth quoting the passage again, this time in full:

The result is that he too is and is called 'God' by grace, that God is and is called man because of him by condescension, and that the power of this exchanged condition is displayed in him. This is the power that deifies man to God on account of his love for God, humanizes God to man on account of his love for humankind, and which, according to this 'wonderful exchange', makes man God on account of the deification of man, and makes God man on account of the humanization of God. For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment. [157]

[157] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1084cd). Other passages that express the reciprocity between divine incarnation and human deification can be found in *Amb.Io.* 3 (PG 91. 1040d); 10 (PG 91. 1113bc); 33 (PG 91. 1288a); 60 (PG 91. 1385b); *Q.Thal.* 22.34-49 (CCSG 7. 138-9); 61.285-96 (CCSG 22. 101); 64.780-91 (CCSG 22. 237); *Ep.* 2 (PG 91. 401b, 408B); *Or.dom*. 97-106 (CCSG 23. 32-3).

end p.99

What Maximus is here describing, it should be recalled, is not that historical incarnation of the Word which took place in Christ. That proleptic event in time is certainly presupposed. Rather what is being described here is an existential, bodily theophany in the creature in whom has been realized the reciprocally proportionate and simultaneous dynamic of deification and incarnation. The demonstrative, theophanic character of this reciprocity is deeply significant, for it confirms for Maximus' monastic readers that that most contingent and mutable object of creation—the human body—when ennobled by deification, has been selected by God in his own good counsel as the primary means of his self-demonstration in the cosmos, and thus the high point of creation's access to him.

Reminding ourselves about the context of the discussion, we can see how it is that Maximus interprets Gregory's affirmation that we are 'a portion of God'. What it cannot mean is that we are divine by nature: God and creation are essentially different. Nor does it imply that bodily incorporation involves a fall from kinship to God. Yet it is clear on the other hand that material creation, being inherently mutable and transient, cannot of itself possess any ontological stability. But that is the point. Its ontological stability rests in God's will and purpose in creating it, and thus in its ordered relation to that will. Kinship to God, expressed by the ontological fact that human beings are created in his image, is fulfilled only through the attainment of likeness to God at the moral level within the corporeal structures and bodily limitations of human existence. These must be transcended, but they are simultaneously the means of transcendence. The impermanence of this universe drives us on to discern the proper purpose and goal of things determined by their *logoi* whose diversity converges metaphysically and teleologically in the unity of the Logos himself. Then, says Maximus, we shall 'no longer cling out of ignorance to the movement that envelops things, because we shall surrender our mind and reason and

spirit to the great Mind and Word and Spirit, indeed, ourselves entirely to God entire, as image to archetype'.[158]

[158] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1088a). This triadic structure of the human being (*nous*, *logos*, *pneuma*) in the image of its trinitarian archetype, which is found in Greg.Naz. *Or.* 23.11.6-7 (SC 270. 302), also appears in *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91. 1196a) and *QD* 101.1-26 (CCSG 10. 79-80).

Far from motion **end p.100** corrupting the divine vocation of human beings, the divine *logoi* are 'on account of their motion naturally adapted by the creator to help them reach the goal'.[159]

[159] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1088b).

Commenting on Gregory's statement where he speaks of the welcome the worthy will receive 'by the ineffable light' when they come to contemplate 'the holy and majestic Trinity' that 'unites itself entirely to the entire mind',[160]

[160] Greg.Naz. *Or.* 16.9 (PG 35. 945c).

Maximus adds that such rational beings have remained undiverted in their course, 'knowing that they are and will become instruments (ὄργανα) of the divine nature'.[161]

[161] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1088ab).

This instrumental function of human nature in the divine plan is aptly illustrated by the instrumentality of the body in the life and activity of the soul. Given the profundity of this passage, I quote it in full:

It is God entire who, in the way of a soul [with a body], has wholly embraced them so that they become like limbs of a body adapted and useful to their master. He directs them towards what he thinks fit and fills them with his own glory and blessedness, graciously giving them unending and ineffable life—a life completely free from every specific accompanying mark of this present life contracted through corruption—not a life consisting in the breathing of air, or in veins coursing with blood, but God entire being participated in by all: God entire becoming to the soul—and through the mediation of the soul, to the body—what the soul is to the body, as he himself knows how, so that the soul receives immutability and the body immortality. Thus the whole human being, as the object of divine action (θεουργούμενο),[162]

[162] This distinctly Dionysian word carries overtones from the liturgical sphere where it designates God's efficacious activity through sacramental ritual acts. See further Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism', *JTS NS* 37 (1986), 432-8; Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 104-11. Also more recently Gregory Shaw, 'Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999), 573-600, who, while rightly arguing against drawing too strict a division between pagan and Christian theurgy, wrongly characterizes post-Dionysian Christian sacramentalism as exclusively anthropocentric.

is deified by the grace of the God who became a human being. He remains wholly human in both soul and body by nature, yet becomes wholly God in soul and body by grace and by the divine radiance of the blessed glory, a radiance appropriate to him, besides which nothing more radiant and exalted can be imagined.[163]

[163] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1088bc).

The repeated occurrence of the word ὅλο demands our attention. The 'whole' human—soul and body—is 'wholly' subject **end p.101** to the activity of God 'entire' and so experiences transformation to incorruptible life. Body, to be sure, is at the lower rung of an ordered hierarchy which rises through soul and intellect to God. But maintained in this proper *taxis*, it too is accessible to God as an instrument via the mediation of the soul.

Here we find Maximus expressing his commitment to the integrity of the body in union with the soul which he holds in continuity with Leontius of Byzantium, the two Gregories, and the fourth-century physician-cum-Christian philosopher Nemesius of Emesa. That this markedly cosmological treatise should give rise to such a metaphor is not unreasonable, for, as we mentioned earlier, among Christian writers the fundamental meaning of the cosmos was best understood by adopting the classical understanding of

the human being as a cosmos-in-miniature (μικρὸ κόσμο). This observation provides us with an appropriate moment to investigate further aspects of Maximus' anthropology—in particular his conception of the soul-body relationship, since it is inescapably bound up with his understanding of the hypostatic union, the Church, and consequently his whole vision of reality.

soul, body, and the mystery of the human vocation

Among the Fathers, actual anthropological dualism, as it was perceived to exist in extreme gnostic circles, was a rarity, even in the more rigorous ascetic systems. The Platonic doctrine of the soul's pre-existence, however, which enjoyed sporadic Christian sympathy throughout Late Antiquity, constantly held out the potential threat of a real dualistic view of the universe. With some exceptions, the Fathers largely resisted this

tendency. As we noted above, Irenaeus envisaged ὁτέλειο ἄνθρωπο not as a purified soul, but as a composite union of body, soul, and spirit created in the image and perfected in the likeness of God. For Clement, the body was the soul's 'consort and ally' with which it is honoured and sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit. [164]

[164] Clem. *Paed.* 1.13.102 (SC 136. 344-8).

Unlike Clement, Origen maintained the pre-existence of the soul, and while he could see the necessity of the body in God's restorative economy, he did not find it constitutive of what it means to be human. [165]

[165] Or. *Cels.* 4.65-6 (SC 136. 344-8); 7.38 (SC 150. 100-2). Yet see Or. *Cels.* 3.41.7-11 (SC 136. 96): 'We affirm that his mortal body and the human soul in him received the greatest elevation not only by communion but by union and intermingling, so that by sharing in his divinity he was transformed into God.' And on the necessity of (present) corporeality, Or. *Princ.* 4.4.8 (SC 268. 422): 'Now there will always be rational creatures that need a corporeal garment, and so there will always be a corporeal nature, the garments of which rational creatures must use—unless someone supposes he can show by any proofs that a rational nature can live apart from a body of any kind.'

end p.102

It is only with Nemesius in the fourth century however that we find a more concerted effort to provide a rational and philosophically attractive account of the relation of the soul to the body and the precise nature and limits of the soul's superiority. Here we find for the first time in a Christian author a clearer picture of the dual nature of the human

being who unites (συναπτόμενο) in himself two distinct orders of cosmic reality: intelligible and sensible, rational and irrational. In Nemesius' words, since man's being

lies on the border (ἐν μεθορίοι) between intelligible and phenomenal, it provides the best proof that the whole universe is the creature of the one God.... God created both an intelligible and a phenomenal order, and required some one creature to link these two together in such a way that the entire universe should form one agreeable unity, unbroken by internal incoherences. [166]

[166] Nem. *Nat.hom* 1 (Morani 3.5; 5.1-6).

Nemesius' contemporaries Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa, who like him were indebted to Origen for their spiritual anthropology, made much of this dual nature and mediatorial function of human creatures. The Nyssene knew of humanity as 'a kind of microcosm, enclosing in itself those very elements which make up the universe'. [167]

[167] Greg.Nyss. *Anim. et res.* (PG 46. 28b).

For the Nazianzen, this understanding was wedded with his conception of two creations and the tripartite structure of the human composite (mind-soul-body), clearly demonstrated in a passage Maximus quotes in our present treatise, where he proposes it as the divine doctor's clear explanation of the origins of humanity's *genesis*:

Mind (νου), then, and sense (αἴσθησι), thus distinguished from one another, remained within their own boundaries, and bore in themselves the magnificence of the Creator-Word, silent praisers and thrilling heralds of his mighty work (cf. Psalm 18: 2). But there was not yet any mingling of both, nor any mixing of these opposites—a mark of a greater wisdom and extravagance [that would be demonstrated in the creation] of natures. Nor, as yet, were the whole riches of goodness known.

end p.103

But then the Architect-Word, when he had determined to demonstrate this and to produce a single living being from both invisible and visible nature, created man. He took a body from already existing matter and breathed into it life from himself, which the Word knows to be an intellectual soul and image of God. He placed this man upon the earth—a sort of second great cosmos in miniature, another angel, a mixed worshipper…. [168]

[168] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1093d); Greg.Naz. *Or.* 38.11 (SC 358. 124-6).

The human being's mediatorial function as a miniature cosmos is expressed even more forthrightly, though with even greater subtlety and insight, by Maximus himself in the seventh chapter of his *Mystagogia* and most notably in the famous *Ambiguum* 41. In the former, Maximus draws a direct parallel between the bipartite structures of the cosmos and the human being. Just as the intelligible and sensible realms make up one cosmos, so soul and body make up one human being, and 'by virtue of the law of the one who bound them', neither of these elements, bound together in inseparable unity, denies or displaces the other. [169]

[169] *Myst.* 7 (Sotiropoulos 186.13-15).

In the latter, he speaks of five divisions (διαιρέσει) of reality: uncreated and created, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female. [170]

[170] *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1304d-1305a).

'Humanity', he writes, clearly has the power of naturally uniting at the mean point of each division since it is related to the extremities of each division in its own parts…. For this very reason the human being was introduced last (ϵσχατο) among beings as a kind of natural bond (σύνδεσμο τι φυσικὸ) mediating between the extremities of universals through their proper parts, and leading into unity (ϵ ϵν) in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one another by a great interval. [171]

[171] *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1305bc).

As these passages suggest, the human being's mediatorial vocation rests upon his mediatorial structure. Specifically, soul itself operates as the mediating element between God and matter, since it possesses faculties that unite it with both: a rational faculty to link it with God through the intellect and an irrational faculty to link it with matter through the senses.[172]

[172] *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91. 1193d).

Let us examine this 'internal' structure more closely.

Nemesius as we saw discerned the primary function of the human being as one of holding in his psychosomatic unity the two **end p.104** realms of being together in unconfused union. Neither the body nor soul, therefore, can entertain independent existence: 'the body is not a living creature by itself, nor is the soul, but soul and body together'.[173]

[173] Nem. *Nat.hom.* 33 (Morani 101.6-7).

Their union is not one of juxtaposition (κατὰ παράθεσιν, παρακ ε῀ισθαι)—like two dancers, nor of mixture (κρασι , κεκρασθαι)—like wine and water.[174]

[174] Nem. *Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani 38.12-39.12).

Instead, citing the authority of Ammonius Saccas,[175]

[175] The Alexandrian Neoplatonist—and, according to Eus. *H.e.* 6.19, teacher of Plotinus and Origen.

Nemesius proposes a union without confusion (ἀσυγχύτω) resulting in a single living subject,[176]

[176] Nem. *Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani 40.10-12).

with the soul remaining distinct as the intelligent principle of life, activity, and movement. *It* modifies and masters the body, not the other way around. It pervades the body without diminution, and is bound and present to the body in the kind of relationship (ὡ ἐν σχέσει) by which God is said to be present with us—not spatially, but relationally (οὐδὲ τοπικω , ἀλλὰ κατὰ σχέσιν).[177]

[177] Nem. *Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani 41.15-19).

Nemesius goes on to invoke the union of the divine Word with his human nature as analogous to the soul's union with the body:

While God the Word suffers no alteration from his fellowship with the body and soul, nor participates in their infirmity when sharing with them his own divinity, he becomes one with them, remaining one just as he was before the union. This mode of mingling or union is utterly new, for he mixes with them throughout yet remains unmixed, unconfused, uncorrupted, unchanged, not sharing their passivity but only their activity.[178]

[178] Nem. *Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani 42.13-19).

Nemesius' language came to achieve great prominence in the christological controversies of the subsequent centuries—except rather than christology serving to illuminate anthropology, as in Nemesius, the union of soul and body was used as a consciously imperfect analogy of the union of two natures in Christ. Leontius of Byzantium in the sixth century could be said to provide the most exacting, scientific application of this analogy. According to a fine study in which Brian Daley demonstrates Leontius' clear dependence upon Nemesius, Leontius' conception of the union of natures in Christ and

the union of soul and body in man 'rests at heart on a subtle and elaborate conception of the dialectical

end p.105 "relationships" (σχέσει) that comprise and coordinate the generic and individual levels of reality'. Critical terms such as *physis* and *hypostasis* are, for Leontius, 'essentially ways of recognizing the underlying and ontologically fundamental communality and distinctiveness of things'. [179]

[179] ' "A Richer Union" ', 252.

In other words, orthodox christology's precise grammatical and conceptual designations serve to articulate the mystery of identity and difference, a mystery particularized and demonstratively enacted in the incarnation.

As an heir to this intellectual tradition, Maximus freely draws upon both orthodox christological insights as well as the dialectical logic of the sixth-century Aristotelian commentators to articulate his spiritual anthropology. In many cases it occurs specifically in the context of his refutation of the pre-existence of souls through his insistence upon the simultaneous coming-into-being (*genesis*) of soul and body as a single, complete human subject. Soul and body are clearly of different substance (*ousia*) and definition (*logos*). Soul is immortal, invisible, and incorporeal. Body is mortal, visible, and corporeal. Through his reading of Genesis 2, Maximus is able to trace this difference in being back to two different sources of being. Soul is constituted immediately from the divine and life-giving insufflation. Body, however, is made by God mediately from the objective matter of the body from which it derives (dust, mother's blood). [180]

[180] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1321c).

Given these natural differences, two questions present themselves. First, how can two substances of opposing qualities be joined to make up (ἀποτελεῖν) a single, complete, unified species? Secondly, given their union, what is the nature of their relation with one another?

At the forefront of Maximus' development of these issues lies the Aristotelian 'principle of relation' (ὁ τοῦ πρός τι λόγος), [181]

[181] See Aristotle *Categoriae* 2. 1^{b}; 7. 6^{ab}.

which he explains applies to parts of a whole that come into existence simultaneously to constitute a single species. [182]

[182] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1100c); *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1324a) *et al.*

The insistence on simultaneous (ἅμα, ὁμοῦ) *genesis* thus becomes all-important, since if one were to pre-exist the other, their *synthesis* to form a particular instance of a generic species (ἄνθρωπος) would either involve a necessary alteration in substance or else imply the endless perpetuation of reincarnation or reanimation. Both these (im)possibilities, which dissolve the principle of relation, are rejected **end p.106** outright. [183]

[183] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1324ab); *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1100d). Owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding of the text, Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 104) wrongly takes Maximus' rejection of the doctrine of metempsychosis in this passage as a (positive) assertion of a perichoretic-like relation between body and soul.

Maximus argues instead for the composite nature of human being: the soul or body of a particular person, each as a part of a whole, can only be considered in relation to that whole person:

Now after the death of the body, the soul is not simply called 'soul' without qualification, but is called the soul of a human being, indeed, the soul of a particular human being. For even after the body, it retains by relation the whole as its own species (ἔχει ὡς εἶδος αὐτῆς τὸ ὅλον κατὰ τὴν σχέσιν), since the [whole] human being is predicated of an individual part. It is likewise with the body which, though mortal by nature, is, by virtue of its creation, not cut loose. For the body is not simply called 'body' after its separation from the soul, even if it is corruptible and naturally returns to the elements from which it is constituted. Like the soul, it too retains by relation the whole as its own species, since the [whole] human being is predicated of an individual part.[184]

[184] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1101b). The language here is clearly related to Porphyry's tree of being (γένος-εἶδος-διαφορά-ἴδιον-συμβεβηκός): 'The higher is always predicated of the lower…. Thus, the individual is contained by the species and the species by the genus, for the genus is a kind of whole, the individual a part. The species is both a whole and a part, a part of another and a whole, not of another but in others. The whole is in the parts.' Porphyry *Isagoge* 7.13-8.2; trans. Edward W. Warren, *Porphyry the Phoenician: Isagoge* (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 41.

The inviolability of this reciprocal relation (σχέσις) between soul and body in no way compromises their substantial, natural difference from one another.[185]

[185] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1101c).

Since the critical point in this relation of parts—that which assures their ontological permanence and indissolubility of relation—is directly related to their simultaneous *genesis* as a complete species, the virginal conception of Christ and his bodily ascension into heaven both serve as the archetypal examples. Prior to the virginal conception, there was no particular soul or body in existence that was to become Christ's. Rather, the divine Word united to himself a whole human nature at the exact moment the latter—a composite made up of soul and body—came into actual being. In this way the simultaneous union-*genesis* of soul and body as an individual human being—in this case one who is also none other than the second hypostasis of the Trinity—is said to be **end p.107** brought about entirely by the will of God.[186]

[186] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1324c-1325b). Also Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 98-9.

In other words, there is no potential naturally inherent in either soul or body capable of effecting and maintaining the union. Their simultaneous *genesis* and *synthesis* is the free, sovereign, and creative act of God. Then in Christ's bodily ascension and session, Maximus finds the foundation for asserting the permanence of the soul-body relationship. Since Christ's body forever remains a constitutive component of the human nature hypostatically united with the Word in heaven at the right hand of the Father, Maximus deems it arrogant to infer that, 'with respect to the advancement of rational beings towards perfection,…bodies will at some time dissolve into non-being'. Who can think this, he adds, and 'believe also that the Lord himself and God of the universe is with a body now and forever, and renders to others the power to be able to advance, and who, as the author of universal salvation, ushers and beckons all towards his own glory, as far as possible, by the power of the incarnation, and who cleanses the stains of all?'[187]

[187] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1332c-1333a).

The Confessor is simply being faithful to the dogmatic tradition which asserts that what is united to God is also saved. To be sure, the very reason the Word became flesh was that he might 'save the image' and 'render the flesh immortal'. 'How then', Maximus retorts in words that underscore the permanence of the soul-body union, 'can what is saved be lost, and what is rendered immortal die?' [188]

[188] *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91. 1336a). See also *Q.Thal.* 54.277-9 (CCSG 7. 459).

Soul and body, then, are necessarily and permanently related to one another by virtue of their simultaneous coming-into-being as a particular human being—as parts of a whole instance of a composite species. Even at death when they are temporarily separated, each can only be spoken of in relation to the whole person whose body or soul it is. Their union is established and maintained, as we noted, by the will and purpose of God. Nevertheless, their natural differences remain, a fact implying that their relation to one another will not be one of equals. The corporeal body, utterly incapable of self-sufficiency per se, remains the instrument of the intelligent soul, for

the whole soul, permeating (χωροῦσα) the whole body, gives to it both life and movement, since the soul by nature is simple and incorporeal. **end p.108**

[The soul does this] in the whole body and in each of its members without being divided or split up by the body, since it is natural for the body to admit the soul according to the body's natural underlying capacity to receive the soul's activity. Present throughout, the whole soul binds together the members variously capable of receiving it in a manner commensurate with its preservation as one body. [189]

[189] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1100ab).

In exploring this further, we are led back into the complex flow of Maximus' explanation in *Ambiguum* 7 as to what Gregory means when he says we are 'a portion of God'. By these words, suggests Maximus, Gregory intended to explain not the cause of human *genesis*, but the reason for the bodily affliction attending empirical human existence. [190]

[190] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1089d).

We recall from the context of Gregory's passage that that reason was related to God's providential and pedagogical economy. The inherent weakness and contingency of bodily life keeps us rational beings humble, 'lest exalted and lifted up from our high status we despise the creator'. But keeping in mind Maximus' distinction between image and likeness, it is also the means of our being likened to God. The rational and intellectual soul, made in God's image, is capable only in its union with the body of receiving likeness to God. By the soul's 'intelligent provision for the lower part' (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴν πρὸς τὸ ὑφειμένον πρόνοιαν)—that is, by fulfilling the commandment to love neighbour as self and its 'prudent care for the body' (ἐμφρόνως τοῦ σώματος ἀντεχομένην), and through its mediating to the body the indwelling maker and his gift of immortality—it endues the body with reason through the virtues and appropriates it to God (οἰκειῶσαι Θεῷ) in such a way that the body becomes its fellow-servant (ὁμόδουλον). [191]

[191] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1092b).

The result, he continues, in terms clearly echoing Nemesius' conviction that the unity of man demonstrates one creator,

is that 'what God is to the soul, the soul becomes to the body', [192]

[192] The phrase is a direct quote from Greg.Naz. *Or.* 2.17 (SC 247. 112.14-15): ἵν᾽ ὅπερ ἐστὶ Θεὸ ψυχῇ, τοῦτο ψυχὴ σώματι γένηται.

and there is manifested the one creator of all who resides proportionately in all beings through humanity, and our manifold and natural diversities converge into one. Then God himself will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15: 28). He will have encompassed and given independent existence to all things in himself, by the fact that no being will continue to possess motion that is aimless and
end p.109
deprived of his presence. It is with respect to this presence and by our reference to the goal of the divine plan that we are and are called 'gods' (John 10: 35) and 'children' (John 1: 12) and 'body' (Eph. 1: 23) and 'members' (Eph. 5: 30) and 'a portion' of God. [193]

[193] *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1092c).

St Paul's expression 'all in all' (πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) forms a natural focal point for meditation, since it presents in exact wording what became the 'golden rule' of Neoplatonism that accounted for the presence of causes in their effects: 'everything in everything but in a way appropriate to each'. [194]

[194] Proclus, *prop*. 103 (Dodds, *Proclus: Elements of Theology*, 92.13): πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν, οἰκείως δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ. In his commentary (254), Dodds mentions the possible Pythagorean roots of this formula, adding that later Neoplatonism 'saw in it a convenient means of covering all the gaps left by Plotinus in his derivation of the world of experience, and thus assuring the unity of the system: it bridged oppositions without destroying them'. Note also the context of Dionysius' use of 1 Corinthians 15: 28 in *De div.nom*. 1.7.

Dionysius' way of expressing this notion, reckoned by Perl to be his 'ultimate conclusion of the theory of participation', [195]

[195] Perl, 'Methexis', 75.

epitomizes the mystery of God's relation to and difference from creation: 'He is all things in all things (ἐν πᾶσι πάντα ἐστὶ) and he is nothing in anything, and he is known to all from all, and to none from any.'[196] Nevertheless, it is important to understand Dionysius' words as an answer to his preceding question, 'How do we know God?' That God is said to be 'all things in all things' is primarily an *epistemological* assertion, or, more correctly, an exclamation of praise. Indeed, the sentence that follows it more clearly states Dionysius' meaning: 'he is known to all from all things and to no one from anything'. The fact that 'he is all things in all things' is immediately qualified by 'and he is nothing in anything' reminds us of Dionysius' overarching apophaticism in which the possibility of any positive assertion of God and creation's ontological identity is excluded. So when in *Ambiguum* 22 Maximus refers to the fact of God's being 'all in all'—'wholly in all beings in general and indivisibly in each particular'—it falls within a rhetorical question in which the matter is regarded as an impenetrable mystery. [197]

[197] *Amb.Io*. 22 (PG 91. 1257ab). See also *Th.Oec*. 1.48-50 (PG 90. 1100c-1101b) in which Maximus distinguishes between God's own ineffable being and his being as a 'work'. God is 'all in all' by what he does, not by what he is in himself. **end p.110**

With Maximus' citations from Ephesians then we are reminded that all that he has been saying about the relation of soul to body and parts to the whole—while steeped in the theological and technical vocabulary of Neoplatonist metaphysics and Aristotelian logic—stems ultimately from his reflections on the scriptural witness to the Church as the body of Christ. It is as he develops this meditation further that we encounter yet another

interpretation of the phrase 'a portion of God'. The soul-body relation sits alongside previously mentioned images of light-air and fire-iron, [198]

[198] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1076a, 1088d).

all three of which, as Perl recognizes, 'illustrate the same metaphysical phenomenon'. [199]

[199] Perl, 'Methexis', 134.

Each image exemplifies God's own theophanic embodiment in Christ, creation, deification, and Church. The metaphysical structure—determined by the union of uncreated and created in the one person who is the incarnate Word—is the same in each case. In each case too the illustrative interpenetration of soul with body, light with air, fire with iron is mutual, but not symmetrical. Just as the natures of body, air, and iron are wholly qualified by the properties of the more active natures of soul, light, and fire, without any nature losing its distinctive properties, so too is creation wholly penetrated by God the Word, who 'wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment'. [200]

[200] See further Perl, 'Methexis', 196.

Hereby Maximus affords us a glimpse into what is a deeply ecclesio-centric cosmic ontology. True cosmic being is fulfilled in the Church, the body of Christ, 'the fullness of him who is filled all in all' (Eph. 1: 23). Christians are 'members' or limbs of this body, who together, to use Irenaeus' favourite christological image ecclesiologically, are being 'recapitulated' (Eph. 1: 10) according to the Father's wonderful plan—hidden in him before the ages (Eph. 3: 9) but now revealed through the incarnation. The incarnation proleptically 'maps out', as it were, and actually performs in corporeal contours God's plan for the creation and perfection of human nature by uniting the extremities of the cosmos in Christ. [201]

[201] See *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1308c-1312b); and *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1333cd), where the incarnate Word, as the author and perfector of our salvation, is said to have provided himself 'as a type and blueprint' (τύπον καὶ πρόγραμμα) with respect to the attainment of virtue (cf. Greg.Naz. *Or*. 7.23 (SC 405. 238-40)). If there were to be a final annihilation of the body in the scheme of perfection, it would have been effected beforehand in his own fleshly economy.

Using a cognate of the verb recalling his **end p.111** assertion of the fixity of our ontological foundation in God (πήγνυμι), Maximus describes how the Son of God, in uniting to himself our nature, 'fixed us firmly to himself (ἑαυτῷ συμπηξαμένου) through his intelligibly and rationally animated holy flesh taken from us, as through a first-fruit (ὡς δι' ἀπαρχῆς)', and 'in the way of a soul with a body, knitted and adapted us to himself by the Spirit'. [202]

[202] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1097b).

In *Ambiguum* 31, Maximus expounds further his very Johannine understanding of St Paul's ascription of the name 'firstfruits' to Christ (1 Cor. 15: 20, 23):

If, then, Christ as man is the 'firstfruits' of our nature with God the Father, and as it were the leaven of the whole lump, and as the Word who is never displaced from his permanence in the Father is with God the Father according to the designation of his humanity, let us not doubt that in accordance with his petition with the Father (John 17: 20-6), we shall be where he is as the firstfruits of our race. For just as having loosed the laws of nature supernaturally he was made low for us without change—a human being as we are, sin alone excepted—so also shall we consequently come to be above because of him—gods as he is by the mystery of grace—altering nothing at all of our nature. Thus again, as the wise teacher says, 'the upper world is filled'—the members of the body

being united to the head according to their worth, each member clearly by its proximity in virtue harmoniously receiving the position (θέσιν) proper to it through the orchestration of the Spirit and filling up the body which 'fills all' and is filled from all—the body of him 'who is filled by all in every way' (Eph. 1: 23). [203]

[203] *Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1280c-1281b).

Has this redemptive dispensation fulfilled in the Church always been part of God's original plan and intent for creation? The affirmative answer to this question belongs to Maximus' refutation of the Origenist cyclical schema in which the end of all things involves a restoration to their pristine former state. Yet the monk has no love for simplistic solutions that fail adequately to discern the inherently mysterious quality of God's eternal will, let alone ones that ignore the great weight of biblical and traditional consensus. We are not to understand his ecclesiological vision of participation in the body of Christ as something entirely other than, or additional to, his ontology of creation, where all creatures participate in the being of God. It is rather its fulfilment. His articulation of the difficulty here as elsewhere [204]

[204] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1328ab).

is achieved by the **end p.112** subtle employment of careful distinctions. And here he makes explicit for the first time in this treatise a distinction that will in the next chapter become crucial for our understanding of his christology: that between *logos* and *tropos*.

God's wonderful plan (παντάγαθο σκοπό) has never received anything new as far as its original principle is concerned (κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον λόγον), but having reached its time for fulfilment, 'he clearly introduced it by means of another, newer mode' (δι᾽ ἄλλου καινοτέρου τρόπου). [205]

[205] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1097c).

The explanation that follows in which can be observed the classical Maximian delineation of divine plan, human fall, followed by the newness of divine restoration must be heard in full:

For God created us [to be] like unto himself by possessing through participation the exact characteristics of his goodness, and gave us the means (*tropos*) which, through the use of our natural powers, leads to this blessed end. But humankind voluntarily (ἑκουσίως) rejected this mode by the abuse of its natural powers. Therefore, lest alienated humankind move still further from God, another means had to be introduced in its place, one more divine and paradoxical than the former to the extent that what is beyond nature is higher than what is natural. And this, as we all believe, is the mystery of the most-mystical dwelling of God with human beings (cf. Rev. 21: 3). 'For', says the divine Apostle, 'had the first covenant remained blameless, no place would have been sought for a second' (Heb. 8: 7). And it is clear to all that the mystery that has come to pass in Christ at the end of the age is the unambiguous demonstration and fulfilment of that which at the beginning of the age was committed to the charge of our forefather. [206]

[206] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1097cd). See also *Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1276b); 41 (PG 91. 1308cd).

On this note we draw to a close a lengthy excursus through one of Maximus' greatest expositions on the ontological foundations of bodily human and cosmic being. A brief summary will bring together our final thoughts.

Having sketched out the principal tenets of sixth-century Origenism, we noted that the springboard for Maximus' refutation of problematic trends among his monastic

readership lies in a request for him to comment on a passage in Gregory Nazianzen in which, given that human beings are 'a portion of God', the meaning of bodily life is questioned as a 'mystery'. We were reminded that in considering the place of the corporeal in Maximus' theological **end p.113** vision we are guided by the distinctly practical circumstances towards which his philosophical articulation is directed.

Secondly, we found there to be two levels at which motion or change in the cosmos must be considered. On the one hand, all created beings are moved since they have been brought by God into being from non-being. Motion that is natural to created beings leads them from non-being into being, and then on a path that leads via well-being to eternal being in union with God. This is the structure of deification, creation's proper goal. But on the other hand, empirical existence possesses a kind of negative instability as the result of the human creature's abandonment of his beginning and source of being from the very moment of his coming-into-being. Maximus can conceptualize an all-important distinction between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian constitution of the body. While he was 'naked', the first human being was certainly not incorporeal or without a body. It was rather that he was free from that 'more resistant constitution which renders the flesh mortal and stubborn.' [207]

[207] *Amb.Io*. 45 (PG 91. 1353ab).

Adam's transgression of the divine command and his material incorporation into the kind of bodily constitution 'that now prevails among us' were simultaneous. [208]

[208] *Amb.Io*. 45 (PG 91. 1353a).

Hence the original mode (*tropos*) by which humanity was to realize its divinely given pattern (*logos*) was interrupted and corrupted. The entry of evil in the form of deviation from one's natural course and the experience of death is the complex result of devilish deception, the abuse of freedom, deliberate choice, and the righteous judgement of God. The fall, through which human beings 'have actualized non-being in themselves', [209]

[209] *Amb.Io*. 20 (PG 91. 1237bc).

is simultaneously moral and ontological, but in that order, for it involves the irrational choice of non-being over being, the love of dust instead of love for God. [210]

[210] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1092c-1093a).

Its ramifications are necessarily cosmological, for *fallen* humanity lacks the means to fulfil its mediatorial vocation as the microcosm in whom the disparate realms of the universe are reconciled and united. Left alone in such a predicament, all material reality—the human body especially—can only be experienced as the exacerbation of dispersal, disharmony, and dissolution. As Maximus summarizes the situation in *Ambiguum* 15:

All beings according to the principle by which they subsist and are, are stable and unmoved. But by the principle of the things observed around **end p.114** them, according to which [principle] the economy of this universe plainly is constituted and disposed, it is obvious that all things are moved and are unstable. [211]

[211] *Amb.Io*. 15 (PG 91. 1217ab).

But thirdly, in spite of the fallen condition, history and creation remain the arena in which is fulfilled God the Word's will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment'. What is ultimately stable and real in the universe is determined by its relation to what is assumed by the incarnate Word, for in Christ a radically new existence has become manifest and accessible by which embodied humanity—and in it, all creation—can attain its proper end and beginning. In view of Christ, human corporeality

in itself cannot be a hindrance but is rather, in its rightful order, a constitutive, signal means of achieving the creaturely goal of likeness to God, since in bodily humanity the divine glory finds the organ for its manifestation and active presence throughout the whole cosmos. The incarnation of God has as its reciprocal correlate the deification of man—a cosmically sanctifying event and process achieved and perfected in the Church, the body of Christ, whose members are parts and portions of God. Thus human participation in God as 'a portion of God', a reality true of every created rational being, is fully realized only by participation in the Word, the substance of the virtues.

This whole vision is expressed by Maximus by means of precise Neoplatonic metaphysical conceptual terminology, shaped on the one hand by Aristotle's (horizontal) analysis of nature in terms of its *telos* and function, and on the other by Proclus' (vertical) theory of participation, both of which serve to transform the Origenist schema. The final state cannot simply consist of a return to a former *henad*, since perfect participation in God—'who is by nature limitless and honourable, and naturally stretches to infinity the appetite of those who enjoy him through participation' [212]

[212] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1089b).

—precludes any possibility of satiation, and infinitely transcends all temporal and spatial limitation. Deification is as endless and infinite as its source. Yet it does not involve a universal assimilation of individuals into the divine essence—the obliteration of essential difference and hypostatic identity—but the utter transparence of all individuality and human actuation in the light of divine activity. This, according to Maximus, is the heart of St Paul's claim that God ultimately will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15: 28), a totality **end p.115** encompassing both intelligible *and sensible* reality. Precisely how such a universal, trans-temporal cosmic vision can be regarded by Maximus to have been achieved definitively through something as precarious as the particular, historical, bodily life of Christ will form the subject of our next chapter.**end p.116**

3 Corporeality and Christ

Christ hath took in this piece of ground,
And made a garden there for those
Who want herbs for their wound. [1]

[1] George Herbert, 'Sunday', 40-2; in Wall, *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple*, 193.

We have seen in the foregoing chapters how manifestly Maximus' thinking on the place of the corporeal in the structure of creation and revelation is dominated by the mystery of the enfleshed Word of God. But if in doing so we failed to discern a marked, qualitative difference between the Word's incarnate economies in Scripture, cosmos, and the virtues on the one hand, and his incarnate sojourn on earth in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the other, we shall find it to be otherwise when in this chapter we investigate more closely the soteriological function of Christ's corporeality. It is an investigation that seeks to understand to what extent *pathos* functions as the incarnation's primary mystery, and thus will necessarily lead us to ask what Maximus considers an acceptable, or indeed the definitive form of orthodox theopaschism. For with the stark fact of the contingent and material dimensions of Christ's corporeal life in time and space, Maximus—along with his Christian forebears—comes face to face with the mystery of divine passibility, a mystery that raises sharply the difficult question about the relation between the utter

impassibility of the divine nature—universally acknowledged as a theological axiom—and the confessed reality of the divine Son's conception, birth, suffering, and death 'for us and for our salvation'.

Although he lived in an ecclesiastical climate where the formal, grammatical relation between orthodox and heterodox theopaschism was still strained and unclear, Maximus is well known for his openness to overtly theopaschite language. Perhaps one of the most striking examples occurs towards the end of his *Mystagogia* when end p.117 he likens God to 'the poor man' (Matt. 25: 40; Jas. 2: 1-13) on account of his salvific solidarity with the poverty of the human condition. Such solidarity is not limited to the humble life of the Son of God in Palestine. Taking into himself the suffering of each person in due proportion, God suffers until 'the perfection of this age', and is said to be 'always suffering mystically out of goodness'. [2]

[2] *Myst*. 24 (Sotiropoulos 238.4-8).

Yet as this chapter unfolds it will become clear how even this profound appreciation of the paschal contours of God's general economic activity is deepened still further in Maximus' more specifically christological reflections in which he extends to the order of the economy the theological distinction between *logos* and *tropos*, contemplates the perichoresis of divine and human natures in Christ at the modal, hypostatic level, and emphasizes in notably Cyrilline fashion the all-encompassing, deifying power of Christ's 'holy flesh'. In the concrete bodily sufferings and death of Christ Maximus encounters 'truly a passible God', the God who precisely in his fleshly, passible *kenosis* has graciously demonstrated and wholly wrought the deification of passible, bodily human nature.

There are other good reasons to pursue this particular line of enquiry with regard to Maximus' christology. The greater part of contemporary theologizing, especially since the horrors of World War I, continues to be scandalized by the Fathers' acceptance as a theological norm of what is widely dismissed as an abstract and largely irrelevant metaphysical principle of Greek philosophy, namely, the impassibility of God. In the view of one especially influential theologian of the past half-century, Jürgen Moltmann, patristic christology and, as a result, all traditional soteriology, is corrupt almost from the start by the Fathers' assertion of divine *apatheia*. [3]

[3] *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 227-35; *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 23-4.

As the argument goes, a God who cannot suffer cannot love—nor can he save those who suffer without violating or overriding the natural human condition. Moltmann's convictions run parallel to a whole trend in modern theology (unconsciously?) indebted to process philosophy in which God ends up necessarily subject to the evolutionary vicissitudes (and ultimately, the dark nihilism) of a meaningless universe. [4]

[4] See the literature adduced by Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 1-25.

end p.118

Our scope here is not to engage directly with contemporary critical scholarship, nor to negate that most poignant and critical difficulty raised for Christian theology by the vast, immeasurable burden of human suffering, whose silent plea continues to rise to heaven like the age-old cry of Abel's blood from the ground and Israel's lament 'How long?', and whose full depths God himself demonstrates to have experienced definitively and vicariously in the prayer of Golgotha, 'My God, my God, why…?' Dietrich Bonhoeffer

was far from capitulating to modernist sympathies when, whilst awaiting execution at the hands of the Nazis, he penned the famous line, 'only a suffering God can help'. Rather our goal is to show that for Maximus the theological problem presented by the hypostatic union in Christ of divine and human, of incorporeal and corporeal, of impassible and passible is coordinate to the function of that union as the dynamic crucible of human salvation, as the historically actual fact that deifies the universe. God's real suffering as Christ, precisely because it really is God the Word's own suffering, bears redemptive, recreative power. Thus Maximus calls the sufferings of Christ miraculous or 'wonderful sufferings' because by virtue of the hypostatic union their destructive character, in fact the whole 'use' (χρη-σι) of death, the ultimate *pathos*, has been reversed. What his suffering and death take away from him—life, honour, glory—are precisely by that very suffering and death given to us. [5]

[5] *QD* i.12.106 (CCSG 10. 143).

In and through his particular sufferings, all human suffering—an ontological and theological more than a psychological reality—is given potentially redemptive significance, in such a way that 'our salvation resides in the death of the only-begotten Son of God'. [6]

[6] *Ep*. 12 (PG 91. 468d).

We shall begin then by presenting a brief overview of theopaschism in the centuries prior to our period, all the time highlighting its correlation to the dual question regarding the integrity of Christ's corporeality and the integrity of salvation in his flesh. Then we shall move on to examine Maximus' christology primarily as it is expressed in his *Ambigua ad Thomam*, in which the question of divine (im)passibility figures as a prominent, even overarching theme, and in which Maximus ventures upon a refined and increasingly rich commentary upon difficult christological passages in Gregory Nazianzen and Dionysius the Areopagite. Finally we shall turn our attention towards the two expressions **end p.119** 'holy flesh' and 'wholly deified', by which Maximus expresses his most mature christological and soteriological convictions in the context of the Monotheletist controversy.

DIVINE IMPASSIBILITY AND THE CORPOREALITY OF CHRIST

It has been argued, not implausibly, that the christological debates of the fifth century were from at least one perspective a struggle over deep-seated efforts to defend and preserve the dogma of God's impassibility. [7]

[7] John J. O'Keefe, 'Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology', *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 39-60; also with specific reference to the Nestorian/Monophysite dispute, see Henry Chadwick, 'Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy', *JTS NS* 2 (1951), 158-62.

Throughout the patristic epoch, as G. L. Prestige once observed, it was 'invariably assumed and repeatedly stated that impassibility is one of the divine attributes. Human nature, on the other hand, is passible, because in men the rational mind is dependent on a fleshly instrument, and consciousness is mediated through physical senses.' [8]

[8] G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd edn. (London: SPCK, 1952), 6.

Passibility, it was discerned, is specifically and strictly linked to corporeality. And so while passibility must properly be denied of God on account of his incorporeal nature, it is also bound somehow to feature in any realist account of the incarnation.

And indeed, theopaschite language with reference to the incarnation was part and parcel of accepted Christian nomenclature right from apostolic times. If it was true that the Word who 'became flesh' and 'tabernacled among us' was the same Word who in the beginning was 'with God' and 'was God' (John 1: 1-14), then surely it was not improper to

speak with Ignatius of Antioch of 'God's passion' (τὸ πάθο του Θεου) or of 'the impassible one who suffered for us',[9]

[9]Ign. *Rom*. 6.3 (SC 10. 114); Ign. *Polyc*. 3.2 (SC 10. 148).

or, as we find in Clement of Alexandria, of 'the living God who suffered'.[10]

[10] Clem. *Prot*. 10.106.4 (SC 2. 174).

Yet this liberty in attributing passibility to God was by and large strictly limited to the dimensions of his saving economy 'for us' and did not extend to the Father or to the transcendent divine nature in general. The same Tertullian who could employ such theopathic language as 'God's sufferings' or 'God's blood'[11]

[11]Cf. Acts 20: 28.

—or even more pointedly, **end p.120** 'God crucified' and 'God dead'—was to combat the Patripassianism of Sabellius and Praxeas with devastating ire.[12]

[12] Tert.*Prax*. 1.5 (CCSL 2, 1160); 16.1-7 (CCSL 2, 1180-2).

Origen too, while equally able to speak of divine suffering, regarded it strictly as an economic, provisional reality, acknowledging with the philosophers God's ultimate moral and ontological *apatheia*.[13]

[13] See Thomas G. Weinandy, 'Origen and the Suffering of God', *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001), 456-60; Ronald E. Heine (ed.), *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 13-32* (Fathers of the Church 89, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 29-32.

In the earlier centuries one could afford to make theopathic expressions in a less guarded manner. But later on in the face of Arianism when it became necessary to affirm Christ's constitution as consubstantial both with the Father and with creaturely humanity, and not much later again in the face of Apollinarianism and Nestorianism when it became necessary to clarify the locus and identity of the acting subject in Christ, such overtly theopaschite language came increasingly to be regarded as possessing questionable legitimacy, or at least in need of careful qualification. At the same time, Docetism loomed as a continual threat with dire soteriological consequences. Such tensions were undoubtedly felt by Athanasius, for example, whom we draw upon here in two instances for what in the ensuing centuries were to become representative issues in the christological debates. In the first passage the relationship between the Word's assumed corporeality and passibility is especially clear. It arises in his letter to Epictetus (*c*.372) at a point where Athanasius opposes the view that the Word in himself was *changed* into human flesh and bones. Rather,

[the Word] appropriated to himself what belonged to the body, as belonging to himself, the incorporeal Word…. For the Word was present with the human body, and what it suffered he referred to himself so that we might be able to partake of the Godhead of the Word. It was a marvel that he was the one suffering, yet not suffering: suffering in so far as the body which was his very own suffered, yet not suffering in so far as the Word, being God by nature, is impassible.[14]

[14] *Epistula ad Epictetum* 6; trans. John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*: *The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology and Texts* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 23, Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1994), 384.

It does not follow, however, that one should reduce the respective actions of Christ—miracles or sufferings—to either his divine or **end p.121** his bodily nature. Thus in our second passage we find Athanasius writing to Serapion:

[Christ's acts] did not occur in dissociation, along lines governed by the particular quality of the various acts—as though the actions pertaining to the body took place apart from the divinity, or the acts pertaining to the divinity took place apart from the body. Rather they all occurred interconnectedly, and it was one Lord who did them all paradoxically by his own grace. [15]

[15] *Epistola ad Serapionem* 4.14 (PG 26. 657a).

In the wake of Nestorianism, Athanasius' emphasis upon the 'one Lord' who is both impassible and passible and whose actions occur 'interconnectedly' was reaffirmed in Cyril of Alexandria's third letter to Nestorius read at the Council of Ephesus (431). It decreed that one should attribute 'all the expressions in the Gospels to the single person, the one incarnate hypostasis of the Word'. [16]

[16] Schwartz, *ACO* i. i. i. 38.21-2.

While the 'Antiochene' conception (as it has been dubbed, somewhat injudiciously) of two coincidental subjects which together make up 'Christ' had the advantage of clarity, as well as of preserving intact the impassibility of the divine nature, Cyril's characteristic emphasis upon the singular subject—'the one incarnate nature of God the Word' (μία φύσι τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη)—held more closely to both the biblical witness and the creed of Nicaea, at the same time possessing greater accessibility and pastoral depth. In general the Cappadocians were careful in their use of theopaschite language, [17]

[17] For a brief analysis of Cappadocian christology, see Grillmeier i. 367-77.

though in a more rhetorical flourish Gregory Nazianzen could speak pointedly of our need for 'a God made flesh and put to death', and went so far as to use an expression—in vogue today since Luther—also found in a fourth-century apocryphal source: 'crucified God' (ἐσταυρόμενο θεὸ). [18]

[18] *Acta Philippi* 6.7.14-15 (CCSA 11. 189). On Gregory, see John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 71.

Despite Nestorian accusations to the contrary, Cyril was far from wanting to teach θεοπάθεια, that is, from ascribing real passibility to the divine nature. [19]

[19] 'The Antiochenes believed that Cyril allowed the human pathos of Jesus to touch the godhead and thereby to compromise God's impassible nature.' O'Keefe, 'Impassible Suffering?', 50. Cyril counters such accusations to Succensus: 'They do not understand the economy and make wicked attempts to displace the sufferings to the man on his own…. They try to avoid confessing that the Word of God is the Saviour who gave his own blood for us, and say instead that it was the man Jesus understood as separate and distinct who can be said to have achieved this. To think like this shakes the whole rationale of the fleshly economy, and quite clearly turns our divine mystery into a matter of man-worshipping.' From *Second Letter to Succensus*, 4 (McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 362).

'The Godhead is impassible', he wrote in his **end p.122** second letter to Nestorius, 'because it is incorporeal.' [20]

[20] ἀπαθὲ γὰρ τὸ θεῖον, ὅτι καὶ ἀσώματον (Schwartz, *ACO* i. i. i. 27.16).

Nevertheless, acknowledgement of the real suffering of the incarnate Word—whether 'impassibly', 'economically', 'by appropriation', or 'in the nature of his flesh' [21]

[21] McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 202.

—as a necessary corollary of his corporeal and fully human existence, became through Cyril's influence a primary touchstone of orthodox christology, as the famous twelfth anathema at the very end of his provocative third letter to Nestorius makes abundantly clear, 'If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh, becoming the first-born from the dead, although as God he is life and life-giving, let him be anathema.' [22]

[22] Ibid., 275. It is worth noting that on account of its wariness of theopaschite language, Chalcedon gave synodical status to Cyril's second letter to Nestorius but not to this his third containing the twelfth anathema. It had to wait until the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 to receive sanction.

Just as the soul, which is inherently impassible, appropriates as its own the pain of the body with which it is united, so too can it be said that the enfleshed Word 'suffered impassibly' (ἐπαθεν ἀπαθω) the weaknesses inherent to the human condition. [23]

[23] *Scholium* 8 (McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 300-1).

It was precisely this form of theopaschism that formed the 'key element' of Cyril's 'basic soteriological intuition'. [24]

[24] Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 70.

Cyril's insistence upon the paradoxical and mysterious character of the coexistence of impassible and passible in one Christ secured his place as the christological champion of both the Chalcedonian and Monophysite traditions. Still, the very real ecclesiastical divisions aroused in the fifth-century christological debates involving the question of divine passibility were not healed when more than five hundred bishops met together in the basilica of Saint Euphemia to decide the matter at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451). In actual fact they were exacerbated. For a great number of Palestinian bishops especially, Pope Leo's **end p.123** formulation, officially ratified during the Council, represented a move away from Cyril and the Nicene creed and a capitulation to the evils of Nestorianism:

For each form, in communion with the other, performs the acts which are proper to it: the Word, that is, performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh. The one [form] shines out in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. [25]

[25] Leo *Tom*. 4 (Schwartz, *ACO* ii. ii. i. 28.12-14): *Agit enim utraque forma cum alterius communione quod proprium est: Verbo scilicet operante quod Verbi est, et carne exsequente quod carnis est. Unum horum coruscat miraculis, aliud succumbit iniuriis*. The Greek translation (Schwartz, *ACO* ii. i. i. 14.27-15.1) runs: ἐνεργει γὰρ ἑκατέρα μορφὴ μετὰ τη θατέρου κοινωνία ὅπερ ἴδιον ἐσχηκεν, του μὲν Λόγου κατεργαζομένου τουθ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶν του Λόγου, του δὲ σώματο ἐκτελουντο ὅπερ ἐστὶν του σωματο , καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐτων διαλάμπει τοι θαύμασιν, τὸ δὲ ται ὕβρεσιν ὑποπέπτωκεν.

At first glance, what Leo is saying is just what Cyril, following Athanasius, had eschewed: the strict reduction of Christ's actions reported in the Gospels to one or the other nature. The crucial, redeeming phrase is his qualification 'in communion with the other', a phrase whose hidden but abiding influence came to especially clear light with Maximus himself and his understanding of perichoresis. It was not enough, however, to

convince many Eastern bishops who considered Leo's letter to Flavian, and eventually with it, the whole thrust of the Synod, to be far from the more direct theopaschism of Cyril and the previous conciliar tradition. In the ensuing controversy between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian factions, both parties attached importance to the identity of the subject of various theopaschite formulae, the adverbial qualifications appending them, and the ascription of both divine and human actions (miracles and sufferings) to a single acting subject. Despite the initial wariness displayed by strict Chalcedonians to overtly theopaschite language, theopaschism increasingly came to figure as the corollary of the realist incarnationalism they themselves were seeking to uphold. For example, the monk Leontius of Byzantium, whose christology is often characterized as somewhat dry, abstract, formal, and scholastic, and who has suffered both in ecclesial and intellectual history through his having been labelled with the incriminatory title 'Origenist',[26]

[26] See the evaluation of Daley, 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', 333-69. Also Grillmeier ii. ii. 185-229.

found it necessary to invoke the fact that the incarnate Word 'can never be considered apart

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from his body'.[27]

[27] *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (PG 86. 1281a).

To his mind, they are 'atheists' who assert the impassibility of the Word 'against Christ' (κατὰ του- χριστου-);[28]

[28] *Dialogus contra Aphthartodocetas* (PG 86. 1321cd).

they fail to appreciate what the Fathers mean when the latter speak of 'God's blood, cross, suffering, and death…'.[29]

[29] *Deprehensio et triumphus super Nestorianos* 41 (PG 86. 1380a).

And Leontius of Jerusalem, by emphasizing the Chalcedonian distinction between *physis* and *hypostasis*, was able more successfully than his Byzantinian namesake to locate the ego of Christ, to whose divine nature has been united a 'passible essence' (οὐσίαν παθητή ν) with all its fully human *idiomata*, at the hypostatic level.[30]

[30] Quoted by Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 77-9; Grillmeier ii. ii. 271-312.

It was in connection with the Church's *lex orandi* in particular that marked efforts took place in an attempt to secure ecclesial unity under the rubric of faithfulness to the Cyrilline-Chalcedonian tradition. Three phases can be identified. The first revolved around the addition of the phrase 'who was crucified for us' to the Trisagion hymn of the liturgy by Peter the Fuller of Antioch in the 470s, so that it was sung, 'Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, thou who wast crucified for us, have mercy on us.' Interpreted christologically, the hymn could be regarded as entirely orthodox, as Severus of Antioch argued in the last of his 125 cathedral homilies. But when in 510 visiting Antiochene monks introduced the addition to Constantinople where the hymn was customarily addressed not to the Son but to the holy Trinity, it was suspected as Monophysite and subsequently (by 518) rejected.[31]

[31] See Grillmeier ii. ii. 254-9.

The second phase revolved around the formula 'one of the Trinity…was incarnate'. In an expression of genuine diplomatic concession Emperor Zeno used this formula in his *Henotikon* (482) to win the Monophysites over to an acceptance of Chalcedon. In it both 'the miracles and the sufferings' are ascribed to 'the one person.'[32]

[32] A detailed study of the *Henotikon* and its significance, with an English translation, can be found in Grillmeier ii. i. 247-317.

But not only did this 'instrument of unity' fail to reconcile the Monophysites; it precipitated schism with Rome, for, among other things, it presented a formula esteemed highly by such

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vehement anti-Chalcedonians and anti-Leonines as Severus of Antioch. [33]

[33] Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, i. 274-5.

The third phase revolved around forms of what is more strictly regarded as the true theopaschite formula, 'one of the Trinity suffered/was crucified/died'. [34]

[34] For historical background and a translation of the text, see John A. McGuckin, 'The "Theopaschite Confession" (Text and Historical Context): A Study in the Cyrilline Reinterpretation of Chalcedon', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984), 239-55. See also Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 185-90.

Promoted in the capital from 519 by the so-called Scythian monks and their leader John Maxentius as a confession to unite divided Chalcedonians and to consolidate Chalcedon in an anti-Nestorian direction, the formula eventually won the support of Emperor Justin I's nephew Justinian. Attempts to gain approval of the formula from Pope Hormisdas (514-23) during Justin's reign proved unsuccessful, but in 533 Rome finally gave it sanction. Justinian's enthusiasm for the theopaschite formula was so great that from the time he became sole emperor (527), no official christological document omitted its confession. [35]

[35] Grillmeier ii. ii. 338. For the affairs of the Scythian monks, see Grillmeier ii. ii. 320-43.

Reluctance to confess the formula came to be seen as a sure sign of Nestorian sympathies. [36]

[36] Chadwick, *Boethius*, 189.

Its establishment as an integral confession in the Constantinopolitan liturgy in 535 with the qualifying word σαρκί ('in the flesh') was strengthened in 553 by the strongly Cyrilline tenth canon of the Fifth Ecumenical Council: 'If anyone does not confess that our Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified in the flesh is true God and Lord of glory and one of the holy Trinity, let him be anathema.'

Justinian likewise underscored the singularity of subject in Christ when he insisted that 'the wonder-worker' and 'the sufferer' are not different subjects, but 'one and the same, our Lord Jesus Christ, the enfleshed Word of God made man'. [37]

[37] Justn. *Conf.* (PG 86. 995cd).

By his influence the ascription of both the miracles and the sufferings to 'one person', which we observed above in Zeno's *Henotikon*, was confirmed by the Fifth Council's third canon.

Justinian's genius in trying to secure a theological basis for ecclesial unity can only be considered remarkable, for both the recognition that 'one of the Trinity suffered (in the flesh)' and that **end p.126** 'both the miracles and sufferings are of the one person' were insights which could be affirmed by Severans and Chalcedonians alike. Yet it could also be argued that it was precisely this common commitment to a generic Cyrilline theopaschism that obscured still-unresolved questions regarding the relationship between the divine subject, God the Word, and his human activity, manifest chiefly under the form of passibility. Whence did this activity-as-passibility spring? Was it a soteriological necessity, an essential facet in the whole divine economy in the flesh? Or was it

incidental—a metaphysical accident, a temporary concession purely limited to the phenomenological, pedagogical plane? Did the theopaschite formula sufficiently preserve the essential dogmatic structure in which the mystery of Christ is comprehended only within a trinitarian, theological framework in such a way that the permanently theological character of christology, canonized in the creed, was safeguarded? Or did it risk blurring the distinction between *theologia* and *economia*, or even collapsing both into an ontologically groundless soteriology? Let us turn now to Maximus and see if we cannot suggest some answers to these perplexing questions.

TRULY A SUFFERING GOD

The *Ambigua ad Thomam*, written as a letter, presents itself as an especially rich and important source of material with which to explore the place of the corporeal in Maximus' christology. Written about mid-career (mid-630s), [38]

[38] Following Sherwood, *Annotated Date-List*, 39.

it provides clear indications of Maximus' emerging opposition to Monenergism, and represents mature reflections on the normative christological traditions—subsequent to his careful elaboration of an anti-Origenist philosophical theology (*Ambigua ad Ioannem* 6-71), yet before his full-scale engagement in the Monotheletist controversy sparked by the promulgation of the imperial *Ekthesis* in late 638. [39]

[39] Around 634 Maximus had indicated that an orthodox interpretation of 'one *energeia*', one of the two phrases outlawed by Sergius in the *Psephos* drawn up in response to the Alexandrian *Pact of Union* and the protests of Sophronius (633), was possible in a qualified way (*Ep*. 19 (PG 91. 592bc); *Opusc*. 9 (PG 91. 132c)). Only with the promulgation of the *Ekthesis* in October 638 does Maximus begin openly to oppose Monotheletism. Interestingly, however, in an explicitly anti-Nestorian polemic, the *Ekthesis* affirms the passibility of the one, incarnate divine subject, to whom both the miracles and the sufferings belong.end p.127

Its insertion as a kind of shorter prologue to the much longer earlier *Ambigua*, an ordering recognized and possibly even appropriated by Maximus himself, [40]

[40] In *Opusc*. 1 (PG 91. 33a) Maximus refers to the second of the earlier *Ambigua ad Iohannem* (our *Amb.Io*. 7) as 'the seventh chapter'. For an appraisal of scholarship on this question, see Bart Janssens, 'Does the Combination of Maximus' *Ambigua ad Thomam* and *Ambigua ad Iohannem* go back to the Confessor himself?', *Sacris Erudiri* 42 (2003), 123-7.

suggests that the Confessor accorded it a theological priority over the whole of the *Ambigua*, thereby underlining their interpretive function in the light of the earlier, larger set. By situating such an explicit theological and christological group of chapters at the head of a work more generally conjectural in character, [41]

[41] See Maximus' own qualifications about the conjectural (στοχαστικω) status of his thoughts in *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1193bc); 19 (PG 91. 1236c); 21 (PG 91. 1244b); 41 (PG 91. 1316a); 42 (PG 91. 1349a); 71 (PG 91. 1412ab).

Maximus makes it clear where his confessional sympathies lie.

And such a clarification may well have been necessary. For in his earlier refutation of Origenism, Maximus was himself prone to think and write in such a way as to risk his own reception as 'Origenist' at another level. [42]

[42] There are a number of polemical sources that associate Maximus with Origenism. One is the caustic Syriac biography edited by Sebastian Brock, 'An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor', *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973), 315, reprinted in Sebastian Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1984). Another, a Syrian Monophysite tract

called *The Heresy of the Maximiennes* by Simeon of Kennesrin and translated by Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica'*, 176-80, aligns Maximus with Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius. A third source is evident in the record of Maximus' trial (*RM* 225-7 (CCSG 39. 29)), where he is accused of 'enticing everyone to follow the doctrines of Origen.'

As we saw in Chapter 1 in material cited from the *Chapters on Theology* especially, Maximus operates with an epistemology patently rooted in Origen, in which, simply put, the *anabasis* of the intellect from the material to the spiritual constitutes the dominant structural metaphor. It would be wrong to write off this epistemological structure as hopelessly intellectualist or esoteric, for it was a complex amalgamation of Pauline and Platonic strands which, over the course of several centuries, had become recognizable as mainstream, as is evident for instance in the fundamental themes of Alexandrian exegesis, Cappadocian spirituality, and Desert monasticism. It is an epistemology marked not only by a wise acknowledgement of the potentially deceptive character of empirical knowledge and the ultimate transcendence **end p.128**
of divine realities, but also a keen sense of the unity, order, and purposefulness of the visible cosmos, and an intuition for its capacity to disclose, albeit in shadows, invisible realities beyond itself.

Nevertheless, while there is nothing heterodox per se about this approach, it lends itself to an interpretation of the incarnation that, in the hands of those 'less well grounded in the essentials',[43]

[43] Sherwood, 'Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus', 207.

threatens its integrity precisely at its primary point of significance. Any unqualified emphasis upon a permanent transition in human apprehension from the flesh of the incarnate Logos to his 'naked' (γυμν΄ο) pre-incarnate form contains in itself the potential to relativize the whole of the economy of God's condescension and turn it into yet another parable of God's universal immanence—a theophany perhaps quantitatively greater than, but qualitatively no different from God's self-manifestation in the economies of creation and history.[44]

[44] Grillmeier suspects Evagrian christology of this problem by its being subsumed within an intellectualist, non-empirical epistemology, in which the eternal (and ontological) significance of Jesus' humanity is minimized. See Grillmeier i. 377-84.

One further implication of such potential relativization is the debasing of materiality and the denial of its inherent redeemability, a problem we discovered in the previous chapter to be not at all incidental in the Origenist debates of the sixth century. This problem becomes all the more acute when we see the peculiar prominence in Maximus' earlier thought of a Pauline text to which Origen had frequent recourse: 'If we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer' (2 Cor. 5: 16). For the great Alexandrian this sentence virtually constituted a formal epistemological principle. As far as we can observe by examining his use of it (often in the context of commenting upon the transfiguration), it is clear he regards knowledge of Christ κατὰ σάρκα as an inferior 'first stage' compared to a higher form of knowing him as he was before his sojourn in the flesh, that is, as he was 'with God' in the beginning. He likens the former kind of knowledge to St Paul's knowledge of nothing except 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2: 2), whereas the latter is exemplified in certain biblical prophets and, above all, in St John the Evangelist.[45]

[45] Or. *Joh*. 2.24.28-9 (SC 120. 224); Or. *Matt*. 12.37 (GCS 10. 152-5); Or. *Jer*. 15.6 (GCS 3. 130); Or. *Cels*. 6.68 (SC 147. 348-50); 7.39 (SC 150. 102-4).

As we have **end p.129** seen in the first chapter of this study, the distinction is capable of an orthodox interpretation when it is seen to mark the return from *economia* to *theologia*, that is, when it is seen as a subjective shift in perception commensurate to the Word's own pedagogical programme. One ceases to know Christ κατὰ σάρκα when one perceives in Christ the eternally existing Word without being blinded or scandalized by his bodily condition, when one attaches oneself to him not on account of the attractiveness of his human personality but out of the conviction that he is truly God. Gregory of Nyssa apparently understands the Pauline text in much the same way, [46]

[46] Greg.Nyss. *Virg*. 2.2.18-25 (SC 119. 268).

and Gregory Nazianzen can cite it in a passage with no uncertain incarnational commitments. [47]

[47] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 30.14 (SC 250. 256).

But John Chrysostom seems to have been aware of the potential pitfalls posed by the text to intellectualist interpreters. He emphasizes the fact that 'not according to the flesh' means *not* that Christ is without the true flesh of his human nature, which abides with him in glory, but that he is no longer subject to the affections of bodily nature, such as thirst, hunger, weariness, and the like. [48]

[48] *Homily* 11 *in 2 Cor*. (Schaff, NPNF xii. 332).

So when Maximus in his earlier works cites the text in apparent sympathy with Origen's interpretation, [49]

[49] *QD* 29.39-40 (CCSG 10. 25); *Th.Oec*. 2.18 (PG 90. 1133ab (cf. Or. *Princ*. 2.11.6)); 2.61 (PG 90. 1152ab (cf. Or. *Cels*. 6.68)).

it is no small wonder that certain aspects of his epistemological method, viewed in isolation from his entire christological vision, might be regarded with suspicion by those not even as maliciously disposed as his Monophysite opponents.

We shall confine ourselves in the present context to suggesting that in the climate of the impending christological debate Maximus may well have been conscious that his epistemology required at the very least some critical qualification. [50]

[50] We are far from reviving von Balthasar's early thesis—which anyway he proposed 'nur als eine Vermutung' (*Kosmische Liturgie*, 13)—of an 'Origenist crisis' in Maximus' career. To that we can bring Sherwood's refutation based on his findings in *Earlier Ambigua*, amply summarized by Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 10-11): 'It is [Maximus'] terminology which is later more clearly defined and not his theology…. [T]here is a very considerable degree of consistency in Maximus' theology from the first ascetic writings onwards….' Next to this, and closer to our point, we may place the important insight made by Florovsky many decades ago: 'St. Maximus to some extent repeats Origen…. But the Logos doctrine has now been entirely freed from the ancient ambiguity, an ambiguity which was unavoidable before a precise definition of the Trinitarian mystery…. [A]ll the originality and power of St. Maximus' new Logos doctrine lies in the fact that *his conception of Revelation is developed within Christological perspectives*. St. Maximus is coming from Origen, as it were, but overcomes Origen and Origenism. It is not that Christology is included in the doctrine of Revelation, but that the mystery of Revelation is discernible in Christology.' Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 216.

With the foundational end p.130 christological narratives at stake, Origenist epistemology could only be admitted within an interpretive context in which the fundamental dogmas of the Church—most specifically its conviction regarding the mutually corrective function of christology and soteriology—form the backdrop for an account of subjective human engagement with God as he wills to make himself known.

So it is that we can plausibly conjecture that Maximus situates the later *Ambigua ad Thomam* before the longer, earlier *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, since it sets down with

dogmatic precision the *lex credendi* whose primary historical form and locus had found expression in the theopaschite shibboleth, *unus ex trinitate passus est*. Herein lies the definitive mark of all orthodox theologizing. It is in relation to this article of faith, in whose formal structure is compressed the credal shift from *theologia* to *economia*, that everything Maximus has to say about Origenism, monastic practice, and scriptural exegesis is to be understood. And more than what Maximus has to say, for, as the Confessor himself would have it, it is the key to a proper reading of the Fathers, who are bound to be misunderstood and abused unless the realities of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, as received in and confessed by the orthodox, catholic Church, are taken into full account equally at the metaphysical, soteriological, and moral levels.

Be that as it may, the shorter corpus bears features that signal its own literary and theological integrity. It is for a start addressed to a certain Thomas, whom Maximus regards as his 'spiritual father and teacher'. [51]

[51] *Amb.Th. prol*. 3 (CCSG 48. 3).

Thomas seems to have been a prominent figure (Abbot?) in the Philippist monastery in Chrysopolis, and some years later (*c*.640) Maximus addressed him a second letter in which he answered Thomas's invitation to clarify some of his responses given in the first set of difficulties. [52]

[52] *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* (CCSG 48. 37-49); text and French translation also in P. Canart (ed.), 'La deuxième lettre à Thomas de S. Maxime le Confesseur', *Byzantion* 34 (1964), 415-45.

Both the *Ambigua ad Thomam*

end p.131

and the follow-up letter share with almost Maximus' entire œuvre the character of occasional works—responses to specific requests to elucidate difficult passages in the traditional material.

The difficult passages in question are from the renowned *Theological Orations* of Gregory Nazianzen (treated in *Ambigua* 1-4), and from the fourth letter of Dionysius the Areopagite to the monk Gaius (treated in *Ambiguum* 5). [53]

[53] It is noteworthy that Maximus himself accords both authors an equal status. Both are among those 'holy, venerable and blessed men' who have received 'every outpouring of wisdom accessible to the saints'. The teaching we receive from them we receive from Christ himself, 'who by grace exchanged himself for them' (*Amb.Th. prol*. 19-29 (CCSG 48. 4)).

On the surface, it may appear that the first difficulty, [54]

[54] CCSG 48. 6-7.

which is 'altogether free from allusion to Christology', [55]

[55] Louth, *Maximus the Confessor,* 48.

bears nothing more than a formal relation to the difficulties that follow. In it the concern has been raised over Gregory's use in two of his sermons of the verb κινεῖν in connection with the divine monad. How can it be said that there is any 'movement' in God? Movement implies three things: first, passibility, that is, the fact of being a passive object, susceptible to the action or causation of another. Secondly, mutability, since movement implies change or diffusion. And thirdly, composition, which for Gregory involves corporeality and opposition. [56]

[56] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 28.7.11-15 (SC 250. 114): 'For every compound is a starting point for strife, and strife of separation, and separation of dissolution. But dissolution is altogether foreign to God and to the primary nature. Therefore there can be no separation, that there may be no dissolution, and no strife that there may be no separation, and composition that there may be no strife. Thus also there must be no body, that there may be no composition….'

How can any of these exist in God who is 'without beginning, incorporeal, and undisturbed'? [57]

[57] *Amb.Th*. 1.22-3 (CCSG 48. 7).

In dealing with this difficulty, Maximus apparently prepares the ground for what he will say in the four following chapters that treat the passibility of God in the person of the incarnate Word. It cannot be incidental that a strictly theological difficulty should be dealt with first, before moving into christology. The consistent application of trinitarian terms and formulae in christology was considered by Maximus a key to apprehending the mystery of the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum*. [58]

[58] In his dispute with Pyrrhus, Maximus found it necessary to defend his application of trinitarian terms to Christ (PG 91. 348cd).

Theologia here **end p.132** functions as an essential prolegomenon to christology, and all the more so because the subsequent christological difficulties involve the question of divine passibility.

Hence before Maximus addresses the immediate question at hand, he embarks upon an elaborate but typical confession of the holy Trinity, clearly distinguishing between the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασι and their cognates. [59]

[59] In *Opusc*. 13 (PG 91. 145a-149d) Maximus argues that the misconstrual of this basic distinction is at the root of all the major errors in trinitarian and christological doctrine.

God is Trinity at the level of the particular (*hypostasis*), and Unity at the level of the common (*ousia*). Neither fact is a separate, self-evident reality, but is spoken of in relation to the other. Thus, 'the Trinity is truly a monad, because this is the way it is (ὅτι οὕτω ἐστὶν), and the Unity is truly a triad, because this is the way it exists (ὅτι οὕτω ὑφέστηκεν), since the one Godhead *is* monadically, and *exists* triadically'. [60]

[60] *Amb.Th*. 1.29-31 (CCSG 48. 7).

The Confessor goes on to relate this distinction to that between *logos* and *tropos*. *Logos* has to do with 'what' a thing is at the level of being (*ousia*). *Tropos* has to do with 'how' a thing is at the level of hypostasis—its actual state or mode of existence. This distinction between 'being' and 'existence' is not a distinction between abstract and actual reality, but a grammatical, logical distinction between the universal, structural makeup of a thing and its existential modality at the level of the particular and concrete. They are theoretical terms expressing two logically distinct dimensions of a single entity. In this case, since the *logos* in question is associated with the unknowable divine *ousia*, it is better understood as indicating the 'fact' of being. Maximus goes on to use this distinction in the second step of his answer that deals with how it is that there is said to be 'movement' in God:

But if when you heard the word 'movement' you wondered how the super-infinite Godhead moves, [know that] the passivity belongs to us, not to it. For first we are illumined about the fact of its being (τὸν του εἶναι λόγον αὐτη). Then we are enlightened about the mode of how it exists (τὸν του πω αὐτὴν τρόπον), since [knowing] that something is, is always conceptually prior to [knowing] how it exists. [61]

[61] *Amb.Th*. 1.32-6 (CCSG 48. 7). The rationale bears striking resemblance to Greg.Nyss. *Tres dii* (*GNO* iii. i. 56.17-57.7): 'We must first believe that something exists, and then scrutinize the

manner of existence of the object of our belief. Thus the question of existence is one, and that of the mode of existence is another.' **end p.133**

So while we cannot ascribe any passive 'being moved' to the triune God, we can speak of movement in relation to the subjective acquisition and order of theological knowledge. The movement of which Gregory is speaking, argues Maximus, refers to an epistemological shift within us, itself specifically occasioned 'through revelation' (δι᾽ ἐκφά νσεω),[62]

[62] *Amb.Th*. 1.36 (CCSG 48. 7).

and which leads us eventually to confess God as simultaneously one and three.[63]

[63] The question of movement in God is also addressed by Maximus in the chronologically anterior work, *Amb.Io*. 23 (PG 91. 1257c-1261a). There it is clear that the first step in theological knowledge is 'the principle of unity', from which one moves by illumination to knowledge of the mode in which such unity exists. Maximus follows another line of thought in Greg.Naz. *Or*. 31.26 (SC 250. 326-8), but going back to Irenaeus and Tertullian, in which there is outlined a progressive order of revelation corresponding to the three eras of salvation history: the time of the Old Testament in which God reveals himself openly as Father; the time of the New Testament in which was manifested the Son; and the time of the Church in which the divinity of the Holy Spirit is more firmly established. In this way, says Maximus, the Godhead can be said to be moved 'by the gradual nature of revelation' (*Amb.Io*. 23 (PG 91. 1261a)).

It is by divine illumination, consequently, that we move from the level of unity, which in the order of *theologia* is denoted by *logos*, to the level of differentiation, which is denoted by *tropos*. In the order of *economia*, however, the pattern is reversed. Unity in Christ occurs at the level of *tropos* or hypostasis, whereas differentiation occurs at the level of *logos* (*ousia*, *physis*). Epistemologically, the latter is arrived at by encounter with the former. The reversal is of profound significance, for if hypostasis is 'the concrete, spatially and temporally limited form in which the mind encounters intelligible or formal reality',[64]

[64] As Daley defines it with respect to Leontius in ' "A Richer Union" ', 248.

and therefore has priority over universal or generic reality in the order of knowing, then christology will always be first and foremost a markedly empirical science. It also means that whatever is contingent in Christ—his corporeality, his suffering, his very particularity as a human being with a name and a face and a history—is charged with revelatory, and thus soteriological power.

If this dynamic lies in the back of Maximus' mind, how does it unfold in the following three difficulties (*Ambigua* 2-4) in which he demonstrates a very real concern to read Gregory's comments in relation to their textual and theological context? It was precisely the more contingent, corporeal aspects of Christ's history that **end p.134** presented Gregory and his audience with a theological dilemma. So with reference to the humbler actions described of our Lord in Scripture, Gregory advised his hearers to 'ascribe the exalted things to the Godhead and to the nature that is greater than passions and the body, and the more lowly things to the composite one who for you emptied himself, was incarnate and, it is no worse to say, became a human being'.[65]

[65] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 29.18.22-5 (SC 250. 216); *Amb.Th*. 2.2-5 (CCSG 48. 8).

At first blush Gregory seems to be suggesting a capitulation to that reductionism which, as we saw in the preceding section, Athanasius before him and the tradition following him had recognized as insufficiently nuanced to depict faithfully the *mysterium Christi*. Yet for Maximus it is unthinkable that the divinely inspired 'Theologian' could have been straying toward the more 'Antiochene' conception of Christ as a coincidence of two quite

independent subjects. To be sure, the distinction Gregory is drawing between 'the Godhead' or the divine nature on the one hand, and 'the composite one' on the other, is not the Nestorian division of Christ into a divine subject and a composite human subject made up of body, soul, and mind. It is rather the distinction between the orders of *theologia* and *economia*, between the Word as he is in his transcendent divine nature and

the Word as he is in the incarnation—a 'composite' (σύνθετο) but single subject at once fully divine and fully human.

Maximus, conscious of the need to read Gregory in context, proceeds by paraphrasing the Cappadocian in terms of clear Chalcedonian logic and Cyril's *kenosis* christology:

While the whole Word of God is perfect being, since he is God, and while the whole [Word of God] is hypostasis without defect, since he is Son, when he emptied himself he became the seed of his own flesh, and having rendered himself composite by the ineffable conception he became the hypostasis of that same assumed flesh. So by this novel mystery [66]

[66] While he resolutely affirms the consubstantiality of Christ's human nature with ours, Maximus concedes the novelty and utter uniqueness of the mode of the incarnation (*Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1097c)).

the whole Word without change truly became a human being. The same Word was a hypostasis of two natures—uncreate and created, impassible and passible, admitting without defect all the natural definitions [of the natures] of which he was a hypostasis. [67]

[67] *Amb.Th*. 2.6-13 (CCSG 48. 8). **end p.135**

Composition, then, is built into the very reality which is the incarnate Word. But at what level? And to what end? It is at this point that Maximus draws in a striking phrase from Gregory's fourth *Theological Oration*—'passible God against sin' [68]

[68] Θ ε ο παθητ ο κατὰ τη ἁμαρτία (Greg.Naz. *Or* 30.1.10-11 (SC 250. 226)). See also Maximus, *Opusc*. 9 (PG 91. 120a).

—by which the status and function of Christ's suffering in the economy are given direction and meaning:

But if the Word admitted substantially all the natural definitions of the natures of which he was a hypostasis, then, lest the sufferings of his own flesh be thought of as merely [human sufferings], the teacher most wisely attributed them to him who became composite at the level of hypostasis by the assumption of the flesh, and, since the flesh was his, to him who in the flesh (κατ᾽ αὐτ ν) is truly 'passible God against sin'. [69]

[69] *Amb.Th*. 2.14-19 (CCSG 48. 8).

Most importantly, what Gregory is doing is not dividing the single hypostasis who is Christ the incarnate Word, but, according to Maximus, 'demonstrating the difference between *ousia*, with respect to which even having become incarnate the Word remains simple, and hypostasis, with respect to which he assumed flesh, became composite, and did business as passible God in the economy'. [70]

[70] *Amb.Th*. 2.20-3 (CCSG 48. 9).

Because the hypostasis who is the incarnate Word is none other than the hypostasis who is the eternal Word and second person of the Trinity, it is necessary to identify it in the economy as a 'composite hypostasis'—a term with a history going back to the first half of the sixth century [71]

[71] Daley in 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', 361 n. 2, traces the term back to John the Grammarian (d. 520). While Grillmeier (Grillmeier ii. ii. 336-8) discovers it in the Chalcedonian

Abbot Euthymius (377-473), teacher of the great Palestinian monastic leader Sabas, our sources for this evidence are late (post-550). According to Grillmeier the term was actually rejected by Leontius of Jerusalem (Grillmeier ii. ii. 295; *pace* Nicholas Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993), 186-7), but revived under Justinian.

—not in order to indicate any change in the divine *ousia*, which remains simple and unaltered, but to show that it is in very fact also the hypostasis of the human *ousia*, which has no particular existence, no separate subsistence or hypostasis independent of him. The term 'composite hypostasis', along with 'passible God against sin', accounts for the incarnate God's passibility without falling into the errors of either Docetism **end p.136** or idolatry, that is, worshipping a naturally passible, and therefore creaturely God.

It remains for Maximus to qualify what he means, or rather, what Gregory means by *ousia*. Here he is conscious of the Arian and Apollinarian errors, both of which 'cut short the integrity of the human nature of the Word, and make him to be passible divinity by nature'.[72] Yet the problem is not only metaphysical, but soteriological. On it depends the efficacy of the salvation wrought by the only-begotten God who has 'become a true human being in every respect, sin alone excluded…yet not excluding natural activity'. [73]

[73] *Amb.Th*. 2.32-6 (CCSG 48. 9).

It is the principle of this natural activity (φυσικὴ ἐνέργεια) that constitutes the definition of *ousia*. It is 'that which is predicated of things as common and generic'. [74]

[74] *Amb.Th*. 2.38 (CCSG 48. 9).

Whatever can be predicated as common and generic to human nature—passibility included—must also be capable of predication to the *ousia* of *Christ's* human nature. Yet, taking Chalcedon in a Cyrilline direction, we are to predicate these properties not simply to his human nature (his 'what'), but to him (his 'who') who is a composite hypostasis of both the divine and human natures—to him who 'is' his natures: the one incarnate Word.

So far we have witnessed Maximus' attempt to apply the formal logic of what David Yeago usefully describes as the 'grammar of sameness and otherness' [75]

[75] 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St. Maximus the Confessor', *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), 170.

to a difficult passage in Gregory's third *Theological Oration*. As Yeago has shown, it is a logic Maximus develops in detail elsewhere, [76]

[76] *Opusc*. 13 (PG 91. 145b).

and most notably in a letter written, perhaps at a slightly earlier date, to Cosmas, a deacon in Alexandria. [77]

[77] *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 544-76). Sherwood, *Annotated Date-list*, 40.

There in a classic passage he explains how it is possible to speak of unity or distinction, first at the level of *ousia*:

Things united according to one and the same substance or nature…are always the same as one another in substance and different in hypostasis. They are the same in substance by the principle of the common equality of essence observed indistinguishably in them in their natural identity. By virtue of this principle, one thing is not more what it is or is called than another thing, but all admit one and the same definition and description (ὅρον τε καὶ λόγον) of substance. **end p.137**

But they are different in hypostasis by the principle of the particular difference that distinguishes them. By virtue of this principle each is distinguished from the other, and they do not coincide with one another by their characteristic properties at the level of hypostasis. Instead, each one in the sum total of its properties brings a totally individual description of what is proper to it at the level of hypostasis. [78]

[78] *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 552bc).

Then at the level of hypostasis:

Things united according to one and the same hypostasis or person (πρόσωπον), that is, things constitutive of one and the same hypostasis by virtue of their union, are the same as one another in hypostasis and different in substance. They are the same in hypostasis by the principle of the indivisible particular (προσωπικη) unity that is constituted from them by virtue of their union. By virtue of this principle the properties differentiating each from what is common to it by substance are, by virtue of their simultaneous coming together with one another in a state of being, rendered characteristics of the one hypostasis constituted from them. They are observed to be identical with one another at the level of hypostasis, admitting no difference whatsoever, as is the case with a human soul and body….

But they are different in substance by the principle of their natural difference from one another. By virtue of this principle, they in no way admit the definitions and descriptions of one another at the level of substance. Instead, each yields a description of its own substance that does not coincide with that of the other. [79]

[79] *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 552d-553a).

Those things that share the same substance are different in hypostasis. Human beings are the prime example, since they share a common human nature, yet differ in their respective hypostases—their particular existences as one or another person, such as Peter or Paul or Mary. But those things that share the same hypostasis are different in substance. One example Maximus is fond of employing in this respect—an example used in the same way by Leontius of Byzantium [80]

[80] V. Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparaison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Échos d'Orient* 25 (1926), 393-406; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 101-4.

—is of a particular human person, a composite of body and soul. Body and soul are different in substance; their natural properties are different and distinct. Yet each has no concrete, independent existence in itself, but only as a complete (composite) hypostasis—as a particular human being. Maximus explains: **end p.138**

For the properties (τὰ ἰδιώματα) that mark off someone's body from the bodies of others and someone's soul from the souls of others, concurring by virtue of their union, characterize and at the same time mark off from other human beings the hypostasis constituted from them. Take for example [the hypostasis] of Peter, or of Paul. Yet [those properties do not mark off] the soul of Peter from his own body, nor the soul of Paul from his own body. For both, soul and body, are identical with one another by the principle of the one hypostasis constituted from them by virtue of their union, because neither exists on its own in separation from the other before their composition by which the species comes about (ἐ γένεσιν εἴδου). For the production, the composition, and the constitution of the species from them according to their composition, are all simultaneous. [81]

[81] *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 552d).

Thus, while at the level of substance or *ousia* the properties of a particular person's body are different from the properties of that person's soul, the properties of each are predicated of that whole particular person, since he or she is that body or soul's hypostasis: its particular mode of existence as one instance of the human species. Their

difference is at the level of 'what' they are (*ousia*); their identity is at the level of 'whose' they are (hypostasis).

By placing this logic from Letter 15 alongside our discussion on the christology of the later *Ambigua*, we do not wish to imply that Maximus thinks that the union of body and soul in a particular human being is anything more than an imperfect analogy of the union of the two natures as a composite hypostasis in Christ. [82]

[82] Thunberg's summary of the analogy at work in *Opusc*. 13 and *Ep*. 15 is accurate (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 101-4), and one may plausibly interpret the relationship of soul to body with the idea of perichoresis. But his main justification for the theory is based, as noted in the previous chapter, upon an unfortunate mistranslation of *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91. 1100d). According to Thunberg (104), Maximus 'not only makes an anti-Origenist use of the terms of transmigration in fact but understands by them, on the human level, what he means by *perichoresis* on the Christological level'. But Maximus does nothing of the sort. Rather he reduces to the point of ridicule the doctrine of the transmigration of souls or bodies in connection with his refutation of the soul's pre-existence.

In this respect Maximus is far more reserved than Cyril, whose liberal application of the analogy the Confessor would probably have considered excessive in his own milieu. For Maximus, the parallels between the union of body and soul and the union of natures in Christ are primarily logical and linguistic; [83]

[83] This should not be taken to mean that Maximus regards the union of natures in Christ in terms of a purely 'grammatical' orthodoxy. On the contrary, he repeatedly insists on the fact of the union πράγματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, not simply κλήσει ('in name'); *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 573a); 17 (PG 91. 581c); 18 (PG 91. 585bc). The references are from Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 72 n. 5.

indeed, he **end p.139** can also speak of a particular ox or dog as a hypostasis. [84]

[84] *Ep*. 15 (PG 91. 549c).

Yeago's comments are instructive when he rightly asserts,

The example does not illumine the *phusiologia* of Christ directly but rather the grammar of the ways in which we use the concepts of identity and difference in the interplay of the registers of ousia and hupostasis. Maximus is not providing a 'model' for incarnation, but suggesting that clarity about the grammar of these concepts will enable us to talk coherently about identity and difference in the inexpressible mystery of Christ. [85]

[85] Yeago, 'Cosmic Redemption', 170.

We are now in a position to trace Maximus' development of this language in his treatment of difficulties from Gregory in *Ambigua* 3 and 4. It is a language that allows him to juxtapose a series of paradoxical claims about Christ which, held together in inseparable, unconfused unity, form a picture that discloses the essentially salvific character of the economy. This use of paradoxes and the concurrent refusal to minimize the tension inherent in the authentic bodily and human life of the divine Word is reminiscent of the approach of Cyril, who 'loved to press the force of this economy by the use of strong paradoxes.' [86]

[86] McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 185.

The increase in occurrences of soteriological formulae (ὑπὲρ σὲ, ἵνα σώσῃ…, διὰ τὸ…), familiar to us from New Testament kerygmatic formulae and Christian homiletical literature, and here used in connection with the incarnation and actions of Christ, indicates Maximus' narrowing focus upon the implications of this metaphysical christo-logic. In *Ambiguum* 3, he comments on a passage from Gregory's second sermon on the Son, in which Gregory had defended the sobriety of a realist interpretation of John 1: 14: that the uncomposed became composed. In his apology, Gregory advanced the

soteriological 'cause' (αἰτία) of the incarnation upon his recalcitrant hearers with evocative force:

That cause was to save you who are insolent, who despise the Godhead for this reason: that having become a human being, that is, as God below (ὁ κάτω Θεός), he admitted your thickness. He engaged flesh through the mediation of mind—since that flesh was mingled with God and has become

end p.140 one, the stronger prevailing—so that I might become God as far as God has become man.[87]

[87] *Amb.Th*. 3.5-11 (CCSG 48. 10). Greg.Naz. *Or*. 29.19.5-10 (SC 250. 216-18).

Gregory's words, 'he engaged flesh through the mediation of mind', indicate a structure familiar to Maximus as mediated through the legacies of Nemesian and Evagrian anthropology. The intellect (νοῦς) is the leading principle (*hegemonikon*) of the human being, and as the primary organ of the spiritual subject constitutes the connecting point to the (divine) intelligent domain, whereas the body connects the human being to the (created) sensible domain, the human soul mediating between both.[88]

[88] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1193d-1196a); *Myst*. 5, 7.

According to Gregory, the assumption of a sensible body by the divine Word takes place via the mind and the soul.

Nevertheless, it is not on the basis of the composition of human nature as body, soul, and mind, but on the basis of the union of the two natures that Maximus here argues that the condition which the Logos has become is composite at the hypostatic level: composite, strangely enough, at the point where union is to be located.[89]

[89] Maximus reasserts this point strongly in his follow-up letter to Thomas (*Epistula secunda ad eundem* 2 (CCSG 48. 42-5)). Christ is not a composite nature, as Severus taught, or else he would be a *tertium quid* consubstantial with neither his Father nor his Mother.

Before his incarnate state, the Word was simple (ἁπλοῦς) with respect to both nature (φύσει) and hypostasis. Maximus summarizes this simple state in terms of incorporeality, affirming that as God, the Word was 'devoid of a body and bodily conditions' (γυμνὸς σώματος καὶ τῶν ὅσα σώματος). But 'now' (νῦν), in order to save, 'by the assumption of flesh with an intelligent soul, he has become that which he was not with respect to the composite hypostasis (τὴν ὑπόστασιν σύνθετος), and remained what he was with respect to the simple nature (τὴν φύσιν ἁπλοῦς)'.[90]

[90] *Amb.Th*. 3.16-20 (CCSG 48. 10-11).

It is by the assumption of human nature in its full reality—flesh endowed with an intelligible, rational soul—that the hypostasis who is the Word is rendered composite. The whole event is disposed in such a way as to ensure both continuity and discontinuity: continuity at the level of nature, in that the divine nature is preserved as simple and entirely 'without change'; discontinuity at the level of hypostasis, not in that the Word ceased to be the second hypostasis of the Trinity, but in that by the assumption of human nature, **end p.141** a composite of body and soul, the hypostasis who is the Word freely becomes receptive to certain conditions basic to a creaturely state. Maximus' way of

describing this outcome is deliberately paradoxical, for we might expect there to be discontinuity at the level of nature—in that the simple divine nature is united to a composite human nature, and continuity at the level of hypostasis—in that the divine subject who is the second person of the Trinity is identical to the subject who is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

This fundamentally paradoxical way of conceiving the incarnation is increasingly seen to be inextricably and necessarily bound to discerning its soteriological function. In a sentence loaded with soteriological formulae, Maximus seeks to articulate this new reality in a kind of running midrash on Gregory's text:

For he had no other reason to be born carnally than to save that nature whose passibility he experienced as a kind of thickness. He 'engaged with flesh through the mediation of mind', 'having become a human being, that is, as God below', and on behalf of all became all that we are, excluding sin: body, soul, mind (through which comes death)—a human being, a community of these—God become visible for the sake of the intelligible. [91]

[91] *Amb.Th*. 3.20-6 (CCSG 48. 11).

It is this real subjectivity to what Maximus calls 'natural sensation' (ὑπὸ τὴν φυσικὴν αἴσθησιν) [92]

[92]*Amb.Th*. 3.28-9 (CCSG 48. 11).

that can, or indeed, must be predicated of the Word who has become flesh. The effects of the union are repeatedly spoken of through metaphors of revelation, visibility, and manifestation, terminology that will feature even more prominently in the next two *Ambigua*. 'Through naturally passible flesh he rendered visible his super-infinite power,' and in clothing himself with flesh he 'fittingly deified it by the hypostatic identity'. [93]

[93] *Amb.Th*. 3.30-4 (CCSG 48. 11).

Deification is not only human assimilation to God, but the salvifically effective, bodily enactment of divine theophany. The 'prevailing' of which Gregory speaks, as Maximus was to clarify later, does not entail the absorption or negation of the human *ousia* by the divine. On the contrary, it occurs entirely at the hypostatic, modal level. [94]

[94] *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* 2 (CCSG 48. 42-5).

The extent of the deification of human beings, then, in terms that have become familiar to us, is conditional upon and proportional to the extent of God's incarnation. Just as in the hypostatic union the

end p.142 Word who 'is his natures' has become voluntarily receptive to the creaturely conditions of human nature, so too in 'the deification of those being saved by grace'—a deification that is given 'in corresponding measure to his emptying', human nature becomes what it was created to become: 'wholly deiform…receptive (χωρητικῶν) to God entire and God alone'. [95]

[95] *Amb.Th*. 3.46-7 (CCSG 48. 12). This line is an exact quote from Greg.Naz. *Or*. 30.6.38-9 (SC 250. 238).

By grace, the finite becomes capable of the infinite. By means of this profound insight—which we would expect from one committed to a Cyrilline interpretation of Chalcedonian dogma, God's passibility in Christ, while still presenting a paradox that defies rational explanation, is understood ultimately as a dynamic reality bound to the attainment of human perfection.

In the first half of his fourth *Theological Oration*, Gregory took up Scripture passages adduced by his opponents one by one, which they appear to have used to support a thorough-going subordinationism. At one point, he treated a series of texts that suggested

the Son's subjection to the Father, including the prayer from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' [96]

[96] Psalm 21: 1; also 1 Corinthians 15: 45. Greg.Naz. *Or*. 30.5 (SC 250. 232-6).

When we come to the difficulty Maximus deals with in *Ambiguum* 4, the Scripture text Gregory was explaining is Hebrews 5: 8, 'Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.' Gregory argued that neither obedience nor disobedience can properly be predicated of the Logos *qua* Logos. Yet in his 'alien form', the Word 'honours obedience by action' and 'experiences it by what he suffers'. In an act of total and gracious solidarity, the incarnate Word experiences suffering and so fulfils the obedience that properly belongs to human nature. [97]

[97] *Amb.Th*. 4.1-18 (CCSG 48. 13); Greg.Naz. *Or*. 30.6 (SC 250. 236-8).

Maximus takes the opportunity to reiterate Gregory in a way that fills out the notion of Christ's obedience and subordination within a fully -fledged schema of orthodox theopaschitism, at the same time weaving into his reading immediate concerns raised by the Monenergist agenda. The fact that he can do so without contrivance may well indicate the perceived subtlety of the threat posed to orthodox theopaschitism by Monenergism—both through what in Maximus' eyes is its minimalist portrayal of the humanity of Christ, and consequently through its implicit denial of the reality **end p.143** of the sufferings of the incarnate Word. The way out of this crisis was to propose, through the characteristically Cyrilline adoption of a series of adverbially qualified paradoxical actions, a doctrine of the true passibility of God in his saving economy.

The foundation of such a doctrine lies in a full appreciation of the precise character of the human condition assumed by the Word. It may be appropriate here to explore this appreciation further. In his writings, Maximus generally distinguishes between two kinds of passibility (πάθο) in relation to human nature. The first is inherent. By virtue of its being brought into being from non-being, human nature shares with all creation a creaturely passivity. [98]

[98] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1073b).

The second is added, a liability introduced on account of Adam's deviation from the good. [99]

[99] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1093c); 42 (PG 91. 1316c-1317b).

In a punitive act of benevolent foresight, God added this passibility, associated with man's corporeality as a composite nature and his capacity for sense, as a means of his eventual restoration. Yet both passibilities are called 'natural'. Both correspond to Maximus' complex conception of human nature as the product of two creations, ontologically though not chronologically distinct, a duality which we have seen is suggested by the two Genesis accounts (Gen. 1: 27; 2: 7). The added passibility, while punitive and restorative in function, is blameless (ἀδιάβλητο): it is the result or consequence of sin, but it is not in itself sinful. [100]

[100] *Q.Thal* 21.5-62 (CCSG 7. 127-9); *Q.Thal*. 42.7-90 (CCSG 7. 285-9); *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316d-1317a); *Opusc*. 20 (PG 91. 237ab).

We have already seen that the Word assumes human nature in its composite sensible and intellectual entirety: mind, soul, and body. But how closely does this human nature assumed by the Word correspond to our own fallen, mutable human condition? If sin, upon which follows corruption and death, is explicitly excluded from the nature assumed by him, how can one speak meaningfully of his participation in our suffering?

Maximus realizes the need to address this problem carefully, for on it hinges the whole question of human salvation. It is a problem he clearly thought long and hard about, and in a number of treatises he offers a detailed treatment. [101]

[101] e.g. *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7. 127-33); 42 (CCSG 7. 285-9); 61 (CCSG 22. 85-105); *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316a-1349b).

Here it is enough for him to assert **end p.144** that the human nature assumed by the Word is the entire, natural, passible nature common to all:

On the one hand, he says, the Word as God is entirely free by nature of obedience and disobedience…. For the law of command and its fulfillment or transgression apply to those who by nature can be moved, not to him who by nature is immobile being.

But on the other hand, in the form of a slave, that is, having become by nature a human being, the Word condescended to fellow-servants and slaves, and assumed an alien form, simultaneously adopting together with our nature the passibility of that nature that is ours. For alien indeed is the penalty of the sinner to one who is sinless by nature. And that penalty is the passibility given in judgement to the whole of nature on account of the transgression. [102]

[102] *Amb.Th*. 4.19-30 (CCSG 48. 13-14).

Part of the solution Maximus here touches upon lies in the dual aspect of the movement involved in the incarnation. In a delightful parallelism he describes this dual aspect under the distinct rubrics of emptying (κένωσι) and condescension (συγκατάβασι), the latter of which seems to indicate a successively 'lower' dimension than the former:

Yet, since he emptied himself in the form of a slave, that is, as a human being, and since he condescended to assume an alien form, that is, he became by nature a passible human being, then in his emptying and condescension he is seen to be both good and a lover of humankind, the emptying showing that he has truly become a human being, the condescension showing that he is truly a passible human being. [103]

[103] *Amb.Th*. 4.31-6 (CCSG 48. 14).

As he is wont to do, Maximus takes what for Gregory are probably synonyms, namely, 'the form of a slave' and 'an alien form', and with them creates a technical distinction that corresponds to the dual level at which human nature exists. By his *emptying*, the Word truly becomes a human being. By this he enters into the first kind of creaturely passibility. By his *condescension*, he truly becomes a *passible* human being. By this he enters into the second kind of punitive passibility. [104]

[104] The significance of this corresponding distinction should not be pressed. Indeed we find the scheme in the reverse order at the beginning of *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316d) in which Maximus links typologically the distinction between Christ's generation (γένεσι) and birth (γέννησι) to the dual levels of the incarnation as condescension and emptying. **end p.145**

What are we to make then of the biblical assertion of Christ's sinlessness (Heb. 4: 15), a fact Maximus repeats tirelessly? And how are we to understand the Word's assumption of a nature bordered by corruption and death, if he is free of the sin upon which they follow? Here we must introduce the other distinction which Maximus only hints at here, and that is between 'blameless' (ἀδιάβλητο) and 'blameworthy' (εὐδιάβλητο) passibility. [105]

[105] *Q.Thal* 21.5-62 (CCSG 7. 127-9); *Q.Thal*. 42.7-90 (CCSG 7. 285-9); *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316d-1317a); *Opusc*. 20 (PG 91. 237ab).

He had already made this distinction between 'blameless' and 'blameworthy' passibility in human nature in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 21 and in *Ambiguum* 42, both of which will be studied in more detail in the final chapter. The sufferings borne by the Word, while clearly present in 'the entire human nature' as a result of judgement, are said, with Cyril, to be 'blameless' (ἀδιάβλητα). [106]

[106] *Amb.Th*. 4.39 (CCSG 48. 14). See further Larchet, 'Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor: A Bridge between Eastern and Western Conceptions', *Sobornost* 20/1 (1998), 36-8.

In another place, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 42, Maximus makes the same distinction within a specifically christological frame of reference in connection with St Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5: 21 that God 'made him who knew no sin to be sin for us'.

After the faculty of choice belonging to Adam's natural reason was corrupted, it in turn corrupted together with itself the nature which had abandoned the grace of impassibility.

And so sin has come about. The first sin, which is blameworthy (εὐδιάβλητο), is the deliberate fall from good to evil; the second, which is a result of the first, and is blameless (ἀδιάβλητο), is the alteration (μεταποίησι) of nature from incorruptibility to corruptibility. These two sins have come about through the forefather by the transgression of the divine command. The first is blameworthy. The second is blameless….

Therefore the alteration of nature towards passibility and corruption and mortality is judgement for Adam's deliberate sin…. The Lord took [upon himself] this judgement for my deliberate sin—I mean nature's passibility and corruption and mortality, and so 'became sin' for me according to passibility and corruption and mortality. [107]

[107] *Q.Thal*. 42.7-15 (CCSG 7. 285); 42.58-67 (CCSG 7. 288-9).

What we have in this brief paragraph is a whole series of paired terms that give formal symmetry to the complexities involved in the incarnation with a view to demonstrate more amply its
end p.146
essentially soteriological thrust. Not many years later (*c*.640) Maximus would make a similar distinction in a different connection in a remarkable passage in *Opuscula* 20.

Instead of using πρόσληψι , the normal term for the Word's 'assumption' of human nature, he uses οἰκείωσι —'appropriation', in this case with regard not to human nature in general but to the 'dishonourable sufferings' associated with it. The verb form of this word had featured in the Council of Ephesus when, in Cyril's third letter to Nestorius, it was said that 'in the crucified body', the only-begotten God 'impassibly appropriated the suffering of his own flesh'. [108]

[108] τὰ τη ἰδία σαρκὸ ἀπαθω οἰκειούμενο πάθη (Schwartz, *ACO* i. i. i. 37.11-12).

In the sentence before our passage, Maximus describes how, in the way of a doctor with a sick patient, it is 'by appropriation alone' out of compassion, that the incarnate God 'expends and destroys the sufferings by the power of his embodiment, until he liberates us from them, yet spares us'. [109]

[109] *Opusc*. 20 (PG 91. 237ab).

At this point, he draws the important distinction:

For the principle of suffering (ὁ περὶ παθῶν λόγο) is twofold. The first is associated with honour (ὁ μὲν τῆ ἐπιτιμία). The second is associated with dishonour (ὁ δὲ τῆ ἀτιμία). The first characterizes (χαρακτηρίζων) our nature. The second debases (παραχαράττων) it completely. Hence the first he admitted substantially (οὐσιωδῶ κατεδέξατο) as a human being, willing so for us, simultaneously securing nature and dissolving the condemnation against us. And he disposed himself to appropriate (οἰκονομικῶ ὠκειώσατο) the second which can be recognized in us and in our insubordinate ways. His purpose was that, having utterly consumed all that is ours as fire does wax and the sun low-lying mist, he might give us a share in the things that are his,[110]

[110] This sentence, with its fire/wax, sun/mist analogies, is from Greg.Naz. *Or*. 30.6.10-12 (SC 250. 236), which same passage heads *Amb.Th*. 4 (CCSG 48. 13).

and that he might render us henceforth not only impassible, but also incorruptible according to the promise.[111]

[111] *Opusc*. 20 (PG 91. 237ab).

As is also evident in this passage just quoted, the upshot of the dual-descent traced by Maximus in *Ambiguum* 4 is seen to be twofold. On the one hand, there is a negative movement, described in terms of what is removed from human nature: badness is 'exhausted'; the penalty of disobedience is 'dissolved'. Both of these are damaging accretions arising from the inclinations of the 'unnatural deliberative mindset'.[112]

[112] *Amb.Th*. 4.41-2 (CCSG 48. 14-15).

On the other hand, there is a positive movement, described in language inspired by 2 Peter **end p.147**
1: 3-4 as the gift of participation 'in his divine power, a power that activates the immovability of the soul and the incorruptibility of the body by the identity of the will around what is good by nature'.[113]

[113] *Amb.Th*. 4.44-7 (CCSG 48. 15).

The beneficial effects of the incarnation extend to the corruptible body, since the extent to which the Word assumed human nature includes, under the rubric of condescension, its bodily corruption. The positive and negative movements are aspects of the Word's active and passive fulfilment of obedience, which he 'honours by action' and 'proves by suffering'.[114]

[114] *Amb.Th*. 4.47-8 (CCSG 48. 15).

This is entirely consistent with a conclusion Maximus draws elsewhere, namely that 'the suffering the incarnate Word underwent was not a penalty (ἔκτισι), as it is with us, but an emptying (κένωσι) on our behalf'.[115]

[115] *Opusc*. 9 (PG 91. 120ab).

Throughout the fourth *Ambiguum* one can detect the spelling out of the Son's saving works in what may be described as corporeally demonstrative terms. It is here in

particular that Maximus moves a step beyond his predecessors to give expression to divine suffering in Christ in a way that amplifies its soteriological implications and at the same time excludes heterodox christologies that lay claim to orthodox theopaschism. For the previous tradition, it was enough to assert that Christ did divine things 'divinely' (θεϊκῶς), and human things humanly or 'bodily' (σωματικῶς).[116]

[116] See the references given in Lampe, *PGL*, 618.

Even Cyril, who said that 'Christ acted divinely and bodily at the same time',[117]

[117] Cyr. *Luc*. 5.12 (PG 72. 556b).

still insisted on maintaining with respect to the one true Son both 'the absence of suffering divinely' and 'the attribution to him of suffering humanly'.[118]

[118] The reference is from the *Second Letter to Succensus* (text in Lionel R. Wickham (ed.), *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 90.14-16): ἔδει γὰρ ἀναγκαίως ἀμφότερα σώζεσθαι τῷ ἑνὶ καὶ κατὰ ἀλήθειαν υἱῷ, καὶ τὸ μὴ πάσχειν θεϊκῶς καὶ τὸ λέγεσθαι παθεῖν ἀνθρωπίνως.

Severus too spoke of the one subject doing miracles 'divinely' and suffering 'humanly'.[119]

[119] Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, i. 273.

With Dionysius the Areopagite, however, we detect the first signs of the inversion of these traditional ideas. In his fourth letter, as a prelude to his articulation of the famous theandric character of Christ's activity, Dionysius denies that Jesus simply did his divine works κατὰ θεόν **end p.14**8 and his human works κατὰ ἄνθρωπον.[120]

[120] Dion.Ar. *Ep*. 4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 161.8-9).

Maximus takes the Dionysian vision and, on the basis of the perichoresis of Christ's natural activities and within the parameters prescribed by Chalcedonian orthodoxy, recasts it positively by means of an inverted formula: the incarnate Word performs the human or fleshly works divinely, and the divine works humanly.

He has remained Lord by nature, yet became a slave for me—a slave by nature, in order to make me lord over the one who had obtained tyrannical control through deceit. That is why, on the one hand, accomplishing the works of a slave in a lordly fashion, that is, the fleshly works divinely, he went about displaying (ἐπεδείκνυτο) his natural and impassible power and asserting his lordship by fleshly means. Through passibility this power erases corruption, and through death creates indestructible life. And on the other hand, performing the lordly works in the manner of a slave, that is, the divine works carnally, he went about declaring (ἐνεδείκνυτο) his ineffable emptying. Through passible flesh this emptying deifies (θεουργοῦσαν) the entire race bound to earth by corruption.[121]

[121] *Amb.Th*. 4.65-74 (CCSG 48. 16).

We shall see the Confessor develop this line of thought even further in the latter sections of this chapter. By the salutary and death-destroying actions performed in paradoxical congruity with the two natures, Christ manifests the 'essential energies' of those natures of which he is a hypostasis.[122]

[122] *Amb.Th*. 4.76 (CCSG 48. 16).

By 'paradoxical congruity' I mean to suggest that for Maximus it is not possible simply to isolate certain actions in the narrative history of Christ by labelling them as either 'divine' or 'human'. At the modal, empirical level, divine acts are seen to be performed in a human manner, human acts in a divine manner. That means that Christ's human actions, such as

suffering and subjection and even death, are not incidental or superficial to the saving economy, but belong constitutively to it, since they function on the one hand as the means of disclosing the divine action of the Logos, and on the other, as we shall see in due course, as the precise means of reversing their potentially negative power. The integrity of neither nature is compromised, yet by virtue of the fact that natural activity, or, more narrowly, that 'the constitutive power of nature' (ἡ κατὰ φύσιν συστατικὴ δύ

ναμι) is the demonstration (ἀποδεῖξι) of *ousia*—a point asserted with formulaic clarity only in the next *Ambiguum*, [123]

[123] *Amb.Th.* 5.15 (CCSG 48. 19).

and that what **end p.149** has been effected in the union is a real 'exchange' (ἐπαλλαγή), [124]

[124] *Amb.Th.* 4.74 (CCSG 48. 16).

the activity of each nature can only be comprehended under the form of 'works'

accomplished 'in united fashion' (μοναδικω) and 'with integral form' (ενοειδω) by the single subject. To put it in another way, the incarnation—and, by extension, deification—is a human act as well as a divine act. And this human activity, most recognizable in the freely accepted passivity of Christ's flesh, is not merely incidental, but a constitutive 'component', if you will, of the saving economy. It is now as he takes up a difficult passage in Dionysius that the full scope of this elaboration upon the paradoxical exchange in the incarnation is unveiled.

SUFFERING WONDERS, WONDERFUL SUFFERINGS

The fifth *Ambiguum* has attracted its fair share of scholarly attention. Part of the reason is that it presents a matrix for analysing Maximus' role as an interpreter of Dionysius the Areopagite, evident in Pelikan's characterization of it as the 'orthodox restatement and reinterpretation of the Dionysian structure…'. [125]

[125] 'The Place of Maximus Confessor in the History of Christian Thought', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium*, 395; see also Enzo Bellini, 'Maxime interprète de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium*, 37-49.

Another reason is that the difficulty in question arises from one of the letters by Dionysius containing a phrase sounding suspiciously Monenergist which, whether in an original or manipulated form, had occupied the centre of a long and divisive christological debate. The phrase is, of course, 'one theandric activity'; or, in the textual tradition reckoned authentic by Maximus and modern editors alike, 'a certain *new* theandric activity'. [126]

[126] See further, in brief, Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 54-6.

Dionysius' letter is actually the fourth in a series to Gaius, a monk under his episcopal jurisdiction. In Chapter 1 we already discovered the decidedly apophatic tone of Dionysius' Letters 1 and 2: knowledge of God involves an entry into a transcendent darkness, for God 'is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and he is known beyond the mind.' [127]

[127] *Ep.* 1 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 157.3-5).

Then in Letters 3 and 4 it appears that our bishop of Athens specifically **end p.150** seeks to apply this *via negativa* to certain scriptural affirmations regarded as bearing christological significance. In contrast to our contemporary christological climate in which people readily assume Jesus' humanity but remain sceptical about his divinity, the prevailing mood in the sixth century accepted Jesus' divine status—for was he not worshipped as God?—but struggled with the reality of his humanity. And so it is that

Letter 4 responds to the biblical ascription of the name ἄνθρωπο [128]

[128] *Ep*. 4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 160.3).

to Jesus (possibly in Philippians 2: 8 or 1 Timothy 2: 5), an ascription that forms a sticking point in Gaius' understanding of God. Dionysius writes: 'How is it, you ask, that Jesus, who is beyond all, has been ranked together with all human beings at the level of being? For here (ἐνθάδε) [129]

[129] It is this reference that causes me to suspect that Dionysius has some definite scriptural passage in mind.

he is not called the cause (αἰτία) of humanity, but is himself, in the whole of his being (κατ᾽ οὐσίαν ὅλην), truly a human being.' [130]

[130] Now from Maximus *Amb.Th*. 5.3-6 (CCSG 48. 19).

This is the portion of the letter before Maximus as he begins his explanation of what he believes Dionysius is up to:

According to his simple interpretation of holy Scripture, the monk Gaius apparently thinks that because God is designated as the cause of all with all the names of those things that have come from him, so also after the incarnation he is again named 'man' in this manner only. Hence the great Dionysius in these words corrects him by teaching that the God of all, as incarnate, is not simply called a human being, but that he is 'himself truly and essentially a whole human being'. [131]

[131] *Amb.Th*. 5.7-14 (CCSG 48. 19).

From here on, Maximus' expository method of dealing with this difficulty indicates his sensitivity to the spirit and structure of Dionysian logic at work here. For the Areopagite as for the Cappadocians, who encountered the Eunomian heresy first-hand, none of the names or categories that apply to created beings are properly applicable to God. Even to say that 'God is' is not strictly accurate. In an apophatic schema it is more accurate to say that 'God is not'—to deny that 'God is'. [132]

[132] See *De div.nom*. 5.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, i. 183.5-10).

In some ways Maximus has followed the same route in the preceding *Ambigua* when he began by asserting the transcendence of the Trinity, and then moved into an engagement with the mystery of God's suffering in the order of **end p.151** the economy. Yet as it has become evident his goal is not simply to unlock the metaphysical complexities of the incarnation, but to enable his readers to discern therein the salutary revelation of the transcendent Logos, and so have him take incarnate form in them. [133]

[133] *Amb.Th*. 5.297 (CCSG 48. 34).

At first he simply restates what has already been said in the previous difficulties: 'God incarnate is to be denied nothing at all of what is ours, apart from sin.' [134]

[134] *Amb.Th*. 5.22-3 (CCSG 48. 20).

Any quasi-docetic interpretation of the Word's humanity is expressly rejected. But then in a shift to what can only be called apophatic terminology, Maximus goes on to draw in material from both Dionysius' third and fourth letters that functions as a controlling hermeneutic to be applied to the paradoxical data generated by the incarnation:

'The eternally transcendent one is not less overflowing with transcendent being,' for when he became a human being, he was not subjected to nature. On the contrary, he rather raised up nature to himself and made it another mystery. And while he himself remained completely incomprehensible, and demonstrated his own incarnation…to be more incomprehensible than any mystery, the more he has become comprehensible because of it, the more he is known to be incomprehensible through it. 'For he is hidden even after his revelation,' the teacher says, 'or, to speak more divinely, even in his revelation.' [135]

[135] *Amb.Th*. 5.50-8 (CCSG 48. 22); Dion.Ar. *Ep*. 4 and *Ep*. 3.

The movement towards knowing God as incomprehensible takes place not only after, but *in* one's engagement with him in his corporeal, contingent self-manifestation. God is known as hidden precisely where he is encountered as visible.

In order to show how this dynamic functions, Maximus moves on to introduce for the first time into the apophatic/kataphatic dialectic the *logos*/*tropos* distinction he had used and explained in a trinitarian context in the first difficulty, *Ambiguum* 1. Maximus' connecting in the incarnation of this distinction with that of apophatic/kataphatic is subtle and profound: Christ's human nature is affirmed, since its *logos* (its 'what') remains completely intact and natural. At the same time, it is transcended, since the *tropos* (the mode or the 'how') in which that nature, in unconfused communion with the divine nature, is freely lived out and encountered at the level of the contingent and particular, is supernatural. **end p.152**

Here we are encountering themes that we find elsewhere in Maximus, most memorably in his meditations on the transfiguration. The Word's self-disclosure is reciprocally proportionate to his concealment in a way that parallels the mysterious union of and metaphysical distinction between the two natures. Yet, paradoxically, it is not the bare natures themselves that we encounter in the concrete events of the incarnation independent of each other, but their unified and unique new mode of existence. As Madden observes with reference to the respective natural activities, 'they can retain their natural identity and at the same time enter into an exchange in his hypostasis, which entitles them to the epithet "new" and the theological status of being theandric'. [136]

[136] Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus Confessor', 194.

Simultaneously manifest and hidden in the particular person Jesus are the intertwined activities of a fully divine nature and a fully human nature, each with its constitutive natural features intact.

Two classic miracles used by the Areopagite and generally favoured by the Cyrilline tradition—both Chalcedonian and Severan—function for Maximus as apt illustrations: the virginal conception and Jesus' walking on water. [137]

[137] The two Gospel events are paired in Dion.Ar. *Ep*. 4 and in an important passage in *De div.nom*. 2.9, where they substantiate the supernatural *physiologia* of Jesus, comprehensible only to faith. Maximus' interpretation echoes that of Severus of Antioch who had appealed to the Gospel accounts (Matt. 14: 25; Mark 6: 48; John 6: 19) of Jesus' walking on the water as demonstrating the insufficiency of the Chalcedonian conception of the two natures. See Grillmeier ii. ii. 138; Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 215 n. 11.

Both involve the affirmation of what are natural human activities: being conceived and born, and walking. But with Jesus these activities are lived out in a supernatural manner, for 'the natural activity of his own flesh is inseparable from the power of his divinity'. [138]

[138] *Amb.Th*. 5.80-2 (CCSG 48. 23).

Thus the conception and birth are of a *virgin*. The walking is on *water*. Yet both miracles demonstrate not the suppression of nature, but a renewed, transcendent manner of operation of what are in fact natural human activities—activities commonly characteristic of the human species. They are both physical manifestations of what Maximus understands to be an overarching soteriological ἀνάγκη at work, so that 'having become in actual fact what nature really is, he has fulfilled without illusion the economy for our sake'. [139]

[139] *Amb.Th*. 5.96-8 (CCSG 48. 24). **end p.153**

We can now move on to clarify the implications of Maximus' teaching on the incarnation for our enquiry regarding the constitutive function of the material and contingent in the economy. First, it is only as *anthropos* that God has become recognizable as the *philanthropos*. In the unique modality that is the particular historical life of Jesus the incarnate Word, all that is inherent in human nature—in all its physical, material, passible contingency—is drawn into a transcendent, supernatural manner of existence in and by which the transcendent God, who in his condescension never ceases being transcendent, becomes visibly accessible precisely as the transcendent lover of humankind. The efficacy of Jesus' love for humanity is dependent upon its ontological ground in divine transcendence. Yet the union of divine and human activities at the level of the particular changes nothing as far as the human nature is concerned. What is new is the supernatural mode in which it is lived out. [140]

[140] 'When for our sake the Word who is beyond being truly assumed our being, he joined to the affirmation of nature the transcendent negation of what is natural to it, and became a human being—the supernatural *tropos* of being (τὸν ὑπὲρ φύσιν τοῦ πῶς εἶναι τρόπον) having been linked to the natural *logos* of being—so that the nature, which does not admit any change in its *logos*, might be confirmed by the newness of its modalities, and so that he might demonstrate the power that surpasses infinity as it is recognized in the *genesis* of opposites.' *Amb.Th*. 5.155-62 (CCSG 48. 27).

And for Maximus, this qualitatively [141]

[141] 'This newness is a matter of quality, not quantity.' *Amb.Th*. 5.238-9 (CCSG 48. 31).

new human existence is re-creative, eschatological, and universal in scope. Once again David Yeago's comments are instructive:

The union of the natures and energies is not…conceived in abstract or merely conceptual terms. Christ himself, as a single subject, a single hupostasis, *is* the true union of the divine and human energies, and their unity is displayed not in any abstract 'godmanhood' which could be described in general terms, but in the self-consistent, singular pattern of his contingent actions, in a word, in the concrete Gospel narrative…. Thus redemption is not a general state of affairs, something which could be described without mentioning the particular person of the redeemer; redemption is what happens in the story of Jesus, impossible to characterize without constitutive reference to 'the things that have come to pass' [τὰ γινόμενα] [*sic*] in that particular narrative. [142]

[142] 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption', 175, 177.

Secondly, it is due to the double—theandric—character of Christ's acts—the voluntary limitation of the operations of the **end p.154** divine nature to the human, fleshly mode, and the lifting up of the operations of the human nature to the divine, transcendent mode—that the mysterious character of the incarnation is preserved and heightened. The exchange of divine and human activities at the level of the modal and particular brings about its redemptive, transformative effects in an at-once hidden and revealed way, so

that while Christ is said to have 'suffered' the miraculous wonders typically associated with the divine nature, the sufferings associated with his human nature—since they are suffered θεϊκῶς —become 'wonderful' or, we could say, wonder-working. [143]

[143] *Amb.Th*. 5.192-200 (CCSG 48. 28-9).

This builds upon Maximus' articulation of the mystery of God's passibility by affirming that while God truly suffers, he does so actively, voluntarily, and salvifically, thereby transforming 'the sufferings of his human nature into active works'. [144]

[144] *Amb.Th*. 5.163-4 (CCSG 48. 27).

We find the same idea expressed at around the same time (*c*. 634) in Maximus' Letter 19 to Pyrrhus. It is noteworthy that Maximus seems here gently to be qualifying the *Psephos* (633) of Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, which had forbidden any talk of either one or two ἐνέργειαι in Christ. Maximus, sympathetic to the *Psephos'* conciliatory aims, yet eager to be faithful to the Chalcedonian confession of 'one and the same Christ…acknowledged in two natures', presents the mystery of the union of the divine and human natures by employing two verbs taken from the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, each denoting one or the other nature: 'what he was' (ὅπερ ἦν), that is, the pre-existent Word (John 1: 1-2), and 'what he became' (ὅπερ γέγονε), that is, a human being (John 1: 14). When these are combined, the result is predictably paradoxical:

So while he became what he was not, [God the Word] has remained what he was, for he is without change. And while he remained what he was, he preserved what he became, for he loves humankind. Through what he was and what he became, he acted divinely, demonstrating what he became to be unaltered; and through them he suffered humanly, proving what he was to be unchanged. For he performed the divine things carnally, because natural activity is not excluded through flesh, and the human things divinely, because he accepted human limitations—not as a matter of circumstance, but freely and willingly. For neither were the divine things done divinely, since he was not bare God, nor were the human things done **end p.155** carnally, since he was not mere man. Hence the wonders were not without suffering, nor were the sufferings without wonder, but the wonders were, if I may venture to say, not impassible, and the sufferings were manifestly wonderful. Both were paradoxical, because both divine and human come from one and the same God the Word incarnate, who in his actions guaranteed by means of both the truth of those realities the natures from which, and which, he was. [145]

[145] *Ep*. 19 (PG 91. 593a-593c).

While the controversial Dionysian term 'theandric' does not occur in this particular section of the letter, Maximus' explanation clearly parallels that which he gives in the fifth *Ambiguum*. Thunberg is surely right when he defines the term theandric as Maximus''*preferred expression of the divine-human reciprocity in action*'. [146]

[146] *Man and The Cosmos*, 72.

But reciprocity does not imply equilibrium. The divine-human union is 'asymmetrical', to use a term first coined by Georges Florovsky. The divine nature is still divine. The human nature is still human: created, and thus naturally subordinate. Their respective activities in communion thus manifest themselves in different ways: divine wonders are *suffered*; human sufferings are *made wonderful*.

HOLY FLESH, WHOLLY DEIFIED

As the controversy over the number of natures, activities, and wills in Christ both widened and deepened, Maximus' recognition of the correspondence between the metaphysical and the soteriological in the incarnation gained increasing prominence in his writings. To detract from the integrity particularly of Christ's 'all-holy flesh', with all its attendant characteristics such as activity and will, would be to 'condemn ourselves to inherit a portion of an imperfect salvation or else to fall from the whole of salvation completely'. [147]

[147] *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* 2.63-4 (CCSG 48. 44).

On that basis Maximus could only affirm his associate Thomas's own intuition regarding the need to 'safe-guard the movement of the soul which mediates between God the Word and the flesh, the movement to which, according to the definition given by the inspired Gregory, even the sufferings of the flesh are to be referred as natural'. [148]

[148] *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* 3.17-20 (CCSG 48. 46).

Anything short of this is, in Maximus' estimation, to charge the Godhead with deceit—as though, in a show of conceited end p.156 pretence, the divine essence either simulated human actions or else succumbed unnaturally to the conditions of carnal humanity. To the extent that the true account is threatened by perversion, 'one is compelled to join in the battle for it and to offer a clear and ordered presentation of it, so that not only believing devoutly with our heart we may be justified, but also everywhere confessing rightly with our mouth we may be saved (Rom. 10: 10)'. [149]

[149] *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* 3.81-4 (CCSG 48. 49).

These are themes we find constantly repeated in the *Opuscula*, many of which were written in the 640s. The 'wholeness' of Christ's human nature, since it is wholly deified, corresponds to the 'wholeness' of human salvation. And the measure of the wholeness of his nature is judged by its level of correspondence to human nature in general, sin alone excepting. In two respects, his nature appears different: he is sinless, and was conceived by an ordinance 'contrary to nature'. [150]

[150] *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1313c).

But these do not amount to natural differences, but modal ones. As far as its *logos* is concerned, Christ's humanity is identical to ours. His birth from the Virgin and his sinless life, however, demonstrate a new mode of existence in which his human nature operates in a manner entirely in keeping with its divinely given definition and vocation. [151]

[151] *Opusc*. 4 (PG 91. 60c); *DP* (PG 91. 297d).

Thus while his body is wholly deified, it does not become divine by nature, for that too would signal an alteration in its essential, created constitution, [152]

[152] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 77b).

and 'nothing at all changes its nature by being deified'. [153]

[153] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 81d).

On the contrary, the redemption effected by Christ involves the restoration of human nature to its fully natural mode of existence in which alone it is capable of its supernatural vocation:

For he did not come to devalue (παραχαράξαι) the nature which he himself, as God and Word, had made, but he came to deify wholly (δι' ὅλου θεῶσαι) that nature which, with the Father's approval and the Spirit's co-operation, he willed to unite to himself in one and the same hypostasis, with everything that naturally belongs to it, apart from sin. [154]

[154] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 77c).

Maximus is repeatedly wary of admitting to Christ's economy any hint of delusion or fantasy. In this he follows the typical anti-docetic strain of Johannine christology. But his

recognizably Athanasian reasoning demonstrates his especial appreciation of the **end p.157** constitutive character of the external and empirical in Jesus' life: it is for the sake of our senses, that is, our creaturely and corporeal condition according to which we can only begin to apprehend divine realities through sensual perception. [155]

[155] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 76d, 80cd); cf. Ath. *Inc*. 14.1-15.7 (SC 199. 314-20); 43.1-7 (SC 199. 418-24).

It is in this connection that a proof drawn from Cyril becomes especially useful, so that Maximus can draw upon it in a number of contexts. Repeating Dionysius, Christ's human acts are not κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, since he is not a mere human being. Nor are his divine acts κατὰ Θεόν, since he is not bare God. [156]

[156] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 85c); *Opusc*. 9 (PG 91. 120b).

Instead, Christ demonstrates his natural energies 'to be thoroughly united by their mutual adhesion and interpenetration'. [157]

[157] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 88a)

Cyril supports this fact when in commenting on the eucharistic significance of Jesus' words in John 6: 53—'unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you'—he speaks of the Saviour using his holy flesh as a 'co-worker' (συνεργάτην). Thus he raises the dead and heals the sick not simply by his 'almighty command' (τῷ παντουργῷ προστάγματι), but also by 'the touch of his holy flesh' (τῇ ἁφῇ τῆς ἁγίας σαρκός). [158]

[158] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 85d). The quotations from Cyril are from Cyr. *Joh*. 4.2 (PG 73. 577cd). Severus found in the combination of Christ's voice and touch the model of how one *energeia* is to be understood (Grillmeier ii. ii. 163-4).

In so doing, says Maximus, Cyril aims to show that 'it is this flesh, to which properly belong touch, voice and the rest, that has the power to give life through its essential activity'. [159]

[159] *Opusc*. 7 (PG 91. 85d). The same argument recurs in *Opusc*. 8 (PG 91. 101a-104a).

Just as a glowing sword as a single instrument both cuts and burns, while each nature, that of fire and that of iron, remains unchanged even 'in acquiring the property of its partner in union', [160]

[160] *Amb.Th*. 5.278-80 (CCSG 48. 33).

so too does Christ effect a double activity in such a manner that his flesh, having acquired the divine ability to give life, and at all times playing a constitutive role in the saving economy, never loses its inherent 'fleshly' properties. As von Balthasar goes so far as to assert,

The divinity of his action finds its ultimate guarantee in the intact and undiminished authenticity of his humanity. Precisely his speech, breathing, walking, his hungering, eating, thirsting, drinking, sleeping,
end p.158 weeping, worrying are the decisive places where the divine makes its appearance…just as far as the decisively human remains in force is as far as God appears. [161]

[161] *Kosmische Liturgie*, 259; ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 261.

It is also at this outermost extreme of human nature—its somatic and sarkic dimension—that redemption needs to occur, for it was via this dimension that Adam first fell. In a passage from *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61, Maximus focuses on the realm of sense and passibility as simultaneously the locus of man's undoing and redemption, the former

under the dispensation of the old Adam, the latter under the dispensation of the new Adam. [162]

[162] Also *Q.Thal*. 21.1-115 (CCSG 7. 127-33).

Nature's inherent passibility, blameless in itself, functions as a 'weapon' or 'instrument' (ὅπλον) capable of exacting either death on the one hand, or life on the other. [163]

[163] *Q.Thal*. 61.77-94 (CCSG 22. 89).

The Word of God's coming in the flesh spells the dramatic reversal of the cursed Adamic cycle of birth, corruption, and death. On account of his voluntary acceptance of the punishment that resides in Adam's flesh, Christ 'reversed the use of death' (ἀντέστρεψε τὴν χρῆσιν τοῦ θανάτου), so that his death in the flesh achieves not the death of nature, but the death of sin. [164]

[164] *Q.Thal*. 61.155-64 (CCSG 22. 93-5).

But this is only the negative effect. The positive effect is suggested in a phrase in which Maximus conjectures a 'more mysterious' interpretation of Gregory's exhortation in his sermon on the *Pascha* for his hearers to 'ascend with Christ' into heaven. [165]

[165] *Amb.Io*. 60 (PG 91. 1384d-1385c); Greg.Naz. *Or*. 45.25 (PG 36. 657b).

The Word's economy in the flesh is the means by which 'the world of the flesh of the Word came to be with the Father'. [166]

[166] *Amb.Io*. 60 (PG 91. 1385b).

Christ's very flesh—crucified, risen, and ascended into heaven—contains in itself the whole ordered universe (ὁ κόσμος) which already participates in the hidden, glorious trinitarian communion.

Perichoresis then is seen to extend beyond the respective activities of the united divine and human natures into the realm of their soteriological efficacy. But either way, its effective locus remains σωματικῶς in strict correspondence with the Son's economy in the flesh. [167]

[167] Cf. *DP* (PG 91. 344bc).

His flesh is not eliminated or overcome; rather its very frailty is rendered potent. [168]

[168] *Q.Thal*. 54.376-8 (CCSG 7. 465).

There it is that 'he put death to death', **end p.159** in order that he might show as a human being that what is natural is saved in himself, and that he might demonstrate, as God, the Father's 'great' and ineffable 'plan' (Isa. 9: 6) fulfilled bodily. For it was not primarily to suffer, but to save, that he became a human being. [169]

[169] *Opusc*. 3 (PG 91. 48bc). This sentence is found also in *Q.Thal*. 63.435-8 (CCSG 22. 173), except there is added an important qualification which brings out the neo-Irenaean Adam-Christ relief more strongly: 'For God did not become man primarily in order to suffer, but to save man through his sufferings under which man, who from the beginning was impassible, has put himself by transgressing the divine commandment.'

Just as Adam's death spells separation from God, Christ's death spells union with God. [170]

[170] *Car*. 2.93 (PG 90. 1016bc); 2.96 (PG 90. 1016c).

Doubtless this is what was in Maximus' mind when we heard him referring earlier to Christ's sufferings as 'wonderful'. But once again, let us emphasize the constitutively corporeal dimensions of this reversal, in this case strikingly rendered in the present tense:

[The Word] effects the overthrow of the tyranny of the evil one who obtained control over us through deception, conquering the flesh which was overcome in Adam by brandishing it as a weapon (ὅπλον) against him. He does this to reveal his flesh, which formerly was crushed by death, as that which captures its captor and by natural death

destroys [the evil one's] life. His flesh becomes on the one hand a poison for him to make him vomit up all whom he had swallowed in his might, since 'he holds the power of death' (Heb. 2: 14), and on the other hand life for the human race, raising like dough all nature towards the resurrection of life. [171]

[171] *Or.dom*. 165-74 (CCSG 23. 36).

Returning to *Ambiguum* 5 to what may be regarded an anti-intellectualist swipe, Maximus puts the recognition of this perichoretic exchange beyond νου as 'indemonstrable'. 'Faith alone' (μόνη πίστι) can comprehend the mystery of Christ, a comprehension that is experienced and lived as worship. [172]

[172] *Amb.Th*. 5.175-6 (CCSG 48. 28). Cf. Dion.Ar. *De div.nom*. 2.9.

Faith alone can discern anything 'wonderful' (θαυμαστόν) hidden under the sufferings of Christ. Likewise, faith alone can discern that divine wonders 'were fulfilled through the natural suffering power of the flesh of the One who worked these wonders'. [173]

[173] *Amb.Th*. 5.198-200 (CCSG 48. 29).

Maximus is here face to face with a paradoxical reality he has expressed elsewhere: 'In himself, in his essence, God is always hidden in mystery; and even when he emerges from his essential hiddenness,

end p.160 he does so in such a manner that, by its very manifestation, he makes it even more mysterious.' [174]

[174] *Cap. XV* (PG 90. 1181bc).

Eventually this cannot but lead to a stance of wonder before the veritable newness of redemption, in which the Confessor repeats what nearly a millennium later became the catch-cry of the Reformation:

For who knows how God assumes flesh and yet remains God, how, remaining true God, he is true man, showing himself truly both in his natural existence, and each through the other, and yet changing neither? Faith alone can grasp these things, honouring in silence the Word, to whose nature no principle from the realm of being corresponds. [175]

[175] *Amb.Th*. 5.226-31 (CCSG 48. 30-1). The meaning of this formula in Gregory of Nyssa is the subject of a study by Martin Laird, ' "By Faith Alone": A Technical Term in Gregory of Nyssa', *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000), 61-79.

But lest we assume too much common ground between Maximus and the Reformers by collapsing their distance, we would do well to add some concluding observations by reconsidering some of our major points within Maximus' own context and that of the emerging Monenergism of the 630s. By recovering the Dionysian 'new theandric activity' as a voice articulating the orthodox confession of two energies and two natures, Maximus opens up a compelling way of conceiving deification. [176]

[176] 'One might even say that the term "theandric" becomes *his preferred expression of the divine-human reciprocity in action*.' Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos,* 72.

Perhaps it is unfair, even inaccurate to say of the Monenergist account of the incarnation what Florovsky once said of Monophysitism, namely, that it is a vision damaged by 'anthropological quietism'. [177]

[177] Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 42.

That was certainly not the intention of Severus of Antioch in the sixth century nor of Sergius of Constantinople in the seventh. Yet logically and theoretically, that is where the Monenergist account leads, and what the orthodox position guards against. According to

the Monophysite schema, the divinization of Christ's 'flesh' occurs only as far as its diminution.[178]

[178] Grillmeier makes this point in Grillmeier ii. ii. 163. The evidence, however, is based on a Latin translation of Severus: *evidens est eam [carnem] non tenuisse sine defectu suam proprietatem* (it is evident that the flesh has not contracted its natural quality without diminution).

A lengthy quote from Grillmeier highlights the difficulties: **end p.161** Severus distinguished various strengths in the controlling influence of the Logos on his humanity. The highest degree is present in the miraculous healings. But what is the case in the everyday life of the Incarnate One?…Severus, in the tradition of Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria, could not properly imagine such an everyday life. The hypostatic union signified for the humanity of Christ the constant claim to participation in the divine life. For this reason on each occasion it also needed permission on the side of the godhead to hunger and suffer, even to die. Such a release of the flesh for the 'blameless passions', however, was due really to a restraining of that power, on which the hypostatic union was built. In warding off the teachings of Julian, Severus trapped himself here in an insoluble dilemma. The *henosis* of Christ was not sought at the right level.[179]

[179] Grillmeier ii. ii. 171.

By contrast, not only does the assertion of two distinct energies in Christ, one divine and one human, and their monadic and paradoxical interpenetration in him, best account for 'the great mystery of the *physiologia* of Jesus'.[180]

[180] *Amb.Th*. 5.119-20 (CCSG 48. 25).

It also furnishes the backbone for an effective and robust soteriology by providing a structure for the reciprocally related account of the mystery of deification, or 'Christification', as Panayiotis Nellas dubbed it,[181]

[181] *Deification in Christ*, 121-40.

in which human nature achieves its full and perfect fulfilment through its supernatural activation right at the level of the corporeal, particular, and mundane. In fact this forms the chief goal and purpose of the incarnation, 'for by living out this [theandric] activity not for himself but for our sake, [the Son] renewed nature by means beyond nature'.[182]

[182] *Amb.Th*. 5.258-60 (CCSG 48. 32). 'The goal of the Incarnation is precisely to make possible a communion between energies, which alone can bring into being the divinization that is the final goal of human life.' Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

And while Christ alone 'is his natures', both divine and human, the latter is the common human nature of all people and hence—recalling Irenaeus' doctrine of *recapitulatio* (Eph. 1: 10)[183]

[183] Iren. *Haer*. 3.16.6-3.21.9 (SC 211. 310-426).

and St Paul's Adam-Christ typology (Rom. 5: 12-17; 1 Cor. 15: 45)—it is cosmically and universally representative.[184]

[184] Curiously Larchet appears to play down the notion of humanity's incorporation in Adam and Christ in Maximus' theology ('Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 35). Yet incorporation is clearly presupposed in a number of important passages (*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316d-1317c, 1325ab); *Q.Thal*. 42.7-76 (CCSG 7. 285-9); *Q.Thal*. 61.1-112 (CCSG 22. 85-113)), and is crucial to Maximus' understanding of the universal scope of the incarnation. See further Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 63-70; Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

At least that is what is suggested in a summary passage near the end of *Ambiguum* 5: **end p.162**

For by the whole active power of his own divinity, the incarnate Word, possessing undissolved the whole passible potentiality of his humanity (combined in union),

performs as God, but in a human fashion, the miracles accomplished through the flesh that is passible by nature, and undergoes as a man, yet in a divine fashion, the sufferings of nature, making them perfect by divine authority. Or rather in both [he acts] 'theandrically', since, being at the same time both God and man, by means of the wonders he gave us back to ourselves—[us, that is]—who show that which we have become, and by means of the sufferings, he gives us to himself—[us, that is]—who have become what he demonstrated. Through both he who alone is true and faithful and wants us to confess what he is, confirms the authenticity of those natures 'from which' and 'in which' and 'which' he is. [185]

[185] *Amb.Th*. 5.285-96 (CCSG 48. 33-4).

Reading the passage just quoted in the context of the whole *Ambigua ad Thomam*, and indeed, in the context of our whole discussion about divine (im)passibility, raises the question as to whether it is possible to posit a flip-side to this redemptive theandric *energeia*: namely, theandric *pathos*. It was the late Dumitru Staniloae who suggested as much when he noted with reference to the fifth *Ambiguum* that 'the endurance of the sufferings is itself also theandric, since it is at the same time the performance of the miracles'. [186]

[186] From his commentary on the *Ambigua* as appended to Ponsoye's translation, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Ambigua*, 382.

The term 'theandric' obviates any reductionistic, and eventually divisive predication of wonders or sufferings, the miraculous or the mundane, to either one or the other nature of Christ, and allows us to understand both in terms of a voluntary and salvific demonstration of the communion of energies at the level of the modal, subjective, and particular. To be sure, divine incarnation and human deification are both theophanic events in which the divine and human natural activities—the latter of which is marked not least of all by increasing passivity or receptivity to God [187]

[187] In his dispute with Pyrrhus, Maximus countered the suggestion that in contrast to divine activity, human activity is *pathos* (PG 91. 349cd). While we might describe the activity of human nature as passive, we cannot define it as such. As Maximus argues (PG 91. 349d), the Fathers only spoke of human movement as passive 'on account of the creaturely principle inherent in it'. Commenting further on Maximus' point in this passage, Keetje Rozemond notes: 'The human energy is a subordinate action: dependent and limited—in that it is created; but even so, it is no less real.' *La Christologie de Saint Jean Damascène* (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1959), 55.

—are welded into a new theandric, deifying **end p.163** dynamic. In Christ, in so far as he actually embodies the point at which the future fullness of human deification is realized, *pathos* becomes 'supernatural' (ὑπὲρ φύσιν). [188]

[188] *Q.Thal*. 22.80 (CCSG 7. 141).

Deification is as much 'suffered' as it is 'achieved'. From the redemptive complex of evidence on display in the incarnation, Maximus brings to bear upon his readers the conviction of the catholic patristic tradition that Christ's suffering, death, and holy flesh, and, implicit with these, the inherent passibility of created human nature, are not obstacles to union with God, but the fundamental loci of God's proleptic demonstration and historic realization of humanity's goal of union with him, [189]

[189] So in defining 'the mystery of Christ' as the hypostatic union in *Q.Thal*. 60.32-63 (CCSG 22. 75-7), Maximus uses the term προεπινοούμενον τέλο to refer to the recapitulation of all creation in God, a union proleptically realized in the incarnation.

and indeed, the expansive media through which he turns suffering and death on its head and brings the whole cosmos to its pre-planned perfection. **end p.164**

4 Corporeality and the Church

This my defiled tabernacle, subject to corruption,
Has been united to your all-pure body
And my blood has been mixed with your blood.
I know that I have been united also to your Godhead
And have become your most pure body,
A member shining with light, holy, glorious, transparent.... [1]

[1]Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* ii. 11-29, quoted by Kallistos Ware, ' "My Helper and My Enemy" ', 103.

In no single work does Maximus present what we might recognize as a systematic doctrine of the Church. Not until much later in Christian history did the Church become the object of dogmatic definition. Nevertheless, it is still possible under the rubric of ecclesiology to offer an account of Maximus' thought concerning the status and function of that notably public and corporeal phenomenon he habitually calls 'the holy Church of God'. And to do so we shall pay especially close attention to portions of his *Mystagogia*. It is true that the *Mystagogia* should properly be regarded as not so much an ecclesiological treatise as an unfolding, symbolic application of the mysteries unveiled in the eucharistic liturgy to the ascetic life. Nevertheless, that application is grounded in the experience of the concrete, housed enactment of the divine liturgy, an enactment that implies a predetermined, given complex of concrete ritual, social, and geographical arrangements. This in itself already suggests a connection with our overarching interest in the deification of the body since, as the liturgiologist Mark Searle has pointed out, liturgy is 'uniquely a matter of the body: both the individual body and the collective body'. [2]

[2]Mark Searle, 'Ritual', in Cheslyn Jones *et al*. (eds.), *The Study of the Liturgy*, 2nd rev. edn. (London: SPCK; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56.

What is the Church for St Maximus? Florovsky spoke of the Church in Maximus' theology as the microcosm or **end p.165** 'macro-humanity' where 'man's fate is decided'. [3]

[3]*Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 243.

Sherwood observed how the Confessor's ecclesiology is more implicit than explicit, more *descriptive* than *definitive*. [4]

[4]*St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 73.

In affirming the liturgico-centric character of Maximus' vision of the Church, Thunberg similarly spoke of his ecclesiology as 'more a dimension than a specified theme of theology'. [5]

[5]*Man and the Cosmos*, 113.

Yet it is, he adds, '*the supreme* dimension', one that 'contains the total vision of Maximus'. [6]

[6]Ibid.

More recently Larchet has said that 'it is to the Church that the mystery of human deification has been entrusted. For Maximus and his forebears, the Church is the milieu where one attains union with God, the place where deification is effected.' [7]

[7]*La divinisation de l'homme*, 400.

According to all these writers, the Church is for Maximus not so much an objective thing as a realm of relations in which there is experienced divine and deifying activity.

But when Thunberg goes on to oppose this 'dynamic' dimension of the Church to her formal, externally ordered existence as a social institution, he proposes an antithesis more

characteristic of the modern era that would, I suspect, appear to the Confessor as strange. In Maximus' mind, claims Thunberg, 'the Church is not an ecclesiastical institution distributing divine grace, but truly a Mystical Body that represents symbolically the whole divine-human mystery'.[8]

[8]*Man and the Cosmos*, 113.

But can such a strict dichotomy be sustained?

We must first recall that, as Henri de Lubac demonstrated some time ago, the phrase 'mystical body' (*corpus mysticum*) only came to be applied to the Church for the first time in the twelfth century. Before then it designated the body of Christ received in the eucharist.[9]

[9]*Corpus Mysticum. L'Eucharistie et L'Église au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 1949).

The phrase was, to be sure, used by some Fathers to refer to the Church of heaven,[10]

[10]De Lubac draws particular attention to Theodoret (d. *c*. 468) and Augustine (*Corpus Mysticum*, 16-17).

and Maximus—without using the term σω̃μα μυστικόν—does seem to think of the Church on earth as a markedly heavenly, eschatological, even divine reality. And following St Paul (1 Cor. 11: 27-31), Maximus draws a close connection between the way believers eat the 'flesh of the Lamb' in **end p.166** the eucharist and 'the well-ordered harmony of the divine body'.[11]

[11]*Amb.Io*. 48 (PG 91. 1364b).

It remains the case however that—whether expressed in his teaching on the incarnation and baptismal regeneration, his anagogical commentary on Scripture and the liturgy, his appeals to the divine authority of Fathers and Councils, his personal exhortations to priests and bishops on the nature of their office, or his apparently lucid confession of the pre-eminence of the Roman See—'the holy Church of God' is for the Confessor neither a spiritual idea nor a utopic ideal, but an actual polis: a substantive, identifiable communion of faith whose inherent unity in Christ and fulfilment of her mediatorial mission is strictly related to her hierarchical orders, eucharistic constitution, orthodoxy of worship, and her faithfulness in doctrine.

Our reasons for investigating Maximus' understanding of the Church in connection with our study on the place of the corporeal in his theology are therefore clear. Prominent in our analysis will of course feature those especially corporeal, external marks of the Church's existence: liturgy, priesthood, sacraments.[12]

[12]The sacrament of holy baptism will be studied in more detail in the final chapter.

These are not simply incidental, material components extrinsic to a more spiritual engagement with the Church's intrinsic, transcendent life. It is precisely as a sacramental, hierarchical, liturgical community that the Church is encountered as the true cosmos, as an ordered universe penetrated by the presence of God. This affirmation does not simply set before us a rhetorical image for mental appreciation, but a profound truth that identifies the liturgically constituted phenomenon which is the Church as the concrete locus whereby Christ is universally identifiable and tangibly accessible in all his salvific splendour. Thus if we want to learn precisely what Maximus regards as ultimately constitutive for the creation, preservation, and perfection of all created and material bodies, we must ultimately look to the Church. And since the Church is Christ's own body, his deifying and incarnate self-location, such an exercise will be emphatically christocentric. As St Gregory of Nyssa put it, 'he who looks to the Church looks directly to Christ'.[13]

[13]Greg.Nyss. *Cant*. 13 (*GNO* vi. 382.2-383.3): ὁπρὸ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν βλέπων πρὸ τὸν χριστὸν ἄντικρυ βλέπει.

For at the centre of all Maximus' thinking about bodies—whether cosmic, scriptural, human, or **end p.167** ecclesial—stands the transfigured, radiant body of Christ. To risk repeating what is now in this study a well-worn theme: in the eschatologically charged account of the transfiguration the human body of Christ becomes the medium of divine glory: the created, visible, symbolic instrument for beholding the invisible light of God. It is, to recall Richard Crashaw's poetic depiction of the Christ-child, 'all Wonders in one sight!' [14]

[14]From his Christmas Ode, quoted by Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 36.

This explains why Maximus looks upon the Church as a wholly pure, unadulterated object for contemplation—utterly untarnished by historical or material contingencies, persecution, or heresy. Since she is Christ's body, she is perfect. By grace she 'gives saving strength to the entire disposition of those who devoutly contemplate her, for she invites the ungodly, imparting to them the light of true understanding, and preserves those who cherish the vision of the mysteries performed in her, guarding as unscathed and without diminution the apple of their spiritual eye'. [15]

[15]*Q.Thal*. 63.13-14 (CCSG 22. 145); 63.36-44 (CCSG 22. 147).

Our principal aim in this chapter then is not to provide a full account of Maximus' ecclesiology per se, but to examine in what way this radiant ecclesial body functions as the *locus deificandi*, the definitive *place* in which all creation reaches its divinely appointed goal of union with God in Christ. In so doing we shall also highlight what Maximus considers, explicitly or implicitly, to be the significance of the external, material aspects of the Church's liturgical life, the conceptual terms with which he expresses that significance, and the relation between these external aspects and the Church's mediatorial vocation. With the designation 'mediatorial vocation' we are already hinting at a connection requiring further explication between Christ's priestly mediation between God and man, heaven and earth, and the Church's fulfilment of the same as his deified body. What we shall argue is that for Maximus the mediatorial veracity of this 'divine body' is inseparable from the ritual and institutional dimensions of earthly ecclesial life. Here again his thinking about the Church is correlative to his christology, in which as we have seen the deification of the whole of human nature through Christ's 'holy flesh' is the reciprocal and direct effect of the mediatorial and hypostatic union in Christ of the divine and human natures. Let us recall briefly Maximus' thinking **end p.168** on this matter in the first of his so-called christological letters, [16]

[16]*Ep*. 12-19 (PG 91. 460a-597b).

where in explicitly biblical language he paraphrases the Nicene Creed, 'the beautiful inheritance of the faith', as it has been taught by the Fathers:

His nature or essence is double, because as 'mediator between God and men' (1 Tim. 2: 5), he must fittingly restore the natural relationship to the mediated parties by his existence as both, so that—in him and through him in very truth, having united the earthly realm with the heavenly, [17]

[17]In *QD* 63.1-6 (CCSG 10. 49) Maximus links Ephesians 1: 10 with its talk of the recapitulation in Christ of 'things in heaven and things on earth' with Ephesians 2: 14-15, in which Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ to make 'one new humanity'.

and having led back to his God and Father the material nature of men that had been made hostile as a result of sin, but is now saved, reconciled and deified (not by an identity of essence but by the ineffable power of his becoming human)—he may through his holy flesh, taken from us as a first-fruit, perfectly make us 'sharers in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1: 4). Hence he is known in fact and not in name alone to be at the same time [18]

[18]This emphasis on the simultaneity of Christ's existence as God and man and its cruciality for the efficacy of his mediatorial vocation has its precedent in Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of Christ as High Priest. See Frances M. Young, 'Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews', *JTS NS* 20 (1969), 152. Thus we may dismiss as inapplicable to Maximus at least the notion, voiced by the great liturgical scholar Josef A. Jungmann, of a general trend in later Greek christology that sublimates Christ's high-priestly activity into his divinity (*The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, trans. A. Peeler (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 239-63).

both God and man. [19]

[19]*Ep*. 12 (PG 91. 468cd).

Let us now proceed by describing how this mediation performed by the incarnate Word, 'our great and true high priest of God', [20]

[20]*Myst*. 23 (Sotiropoulos 214.10-11).

is made concretely accessible.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE GOSPEL: GOD VISIBLE ON EARTH

In characteristically biblical terms, the holy flesh of Christ in the passage just quoted is the very meeting point of God and humanity, [21]

[21]John 1: 14, 18; 6: 53-7; 7: 37; 14: 9; 20: 28; 1 John 1: 1-3; Rev. 21: 3.

a reality prefigured in Israel's worship by the priesthood, [22]

[22]Exod. 29: 42-6.

the **end p.169** tabernacle, [23]

[23]Exod. 33: 7-11; 40: 34-5.

the holy name, [24]

[24]Exod. 33: 12-23; 34: 5-7; Deut. 12: 5; 2 Chron. 6: 1-11.

the altar, [25]

[25]Lev. 9: 1-24.

the holy of holies, [26]

[26]Exod. 25: 22; Num. 7: 89.

and the temple. [27]

[27]2 Chron. 7: 14-16.

This emphasis on mediation through location—through the whole incarnate divine Son rather than through any single specific deed, was to become an important characteristic of Byzantine liturgical theology, as we witness in Nicholas Cabasilas' *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* from the fourteenth century: '[Christ] is mediator between God and man, not by his words or prayers, but in himself; because he is both God and man, he has reunited the two, making himself the meeting-ground of both.' [28]

[28]Chapter 49 in J. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty (trans.), *Nicholas Cabasilas: A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1960), 110. While it is safe to assert as a general trend in Byzantine theology this emphasis upon the saving efficacy of the whole incarnation rather than upon any specific deed of Christ, it ought not be overstressed, or at least, not in Maximus' theology. Maximus is often led to focus on certain events in Christ's life—his virginal conception and birth, his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, the transfiguration, his agony in the

garden, his death, and finally his resurrection and ascension. Each possesses in a varying respect a distinct and integral soteriological place and function in the overall redemptive economy. Blowers offers some subtle reflections on and, I believe, a balanced appraisal of scholarly trends in this connection in 'The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001), 361-77.

Such an emphasis suggests an understanding of the liturgy—and of the eucharist in particular—primarily as a performative epiphany of the transfigured Lord who, present as high-priest, radiates through his body the light of his divine glory. [29]

[29]On this point we would express agreement with Jungmann's estimation that central to this epiphanic understanding of the Byzantine mass is the human-ward movement of the Logos sent by the Father. But we would disagree quite strongly if this were taken to exclude a reciprocal human movement towards the Father through the mediating Logos. What must be avoided is any simplistic (Nestorian *or* Monophysite) reduction of 'divine service' to either a divine or a human activity. See Jungmann, *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, 239-63, and esp. 252-5.

With this distinctly liturgical theme of Christ as priest and mediator before us, it is appropriate to explore further Maximus' remarks on what he knows as, in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood of the old dispensation, ἡ του̃ εὐαγγελίου ἱερωσύνη—'the priesthood of the gospel'. [30]

[30]*QD* 7.7-8 (CCSG 10. 7). **end p.170** On numerous occasions in his role as spiritual father Maximus was presented with opportunities to write to associates occupying a wide range of prominent political and ecclesiastical positions. It is in his friendly exhortations to two bishops in particular that we find four passages providing subtle indications of his high esteem for the priestly office and of his understanding of its function to present God visibly on earth to the eyes of faith. This distinctly christocentric and sacramental character of the priesthood, or more specifically, of the episcopate, is especially evident in his calling it τὸ τη̃ς ἀρχιερωσύνης μυστήριον. [31]

[31]*Ep*. 28 (PG 91. 621a). In Maximus' works the terms ἱερεύς and ἱερωσυνή generally refer to the bishop and the episcopal office without excluding the priesthood.

Of the four passages, all of which predate 630, [32]

[32]Following Sherwood, *Annotated Date-List*.

three come from letters addressed to his close friend John, Bishop of Cyzicus, whom he came to know when he lived at the monastery of St George, and to whom he addressed the great earlier *Ambigua*. [33]

[33]We reservedly accept the authority of Combéfis, as reported by Sherwood (*Annotated Date-List*, 27), who supposes the 'Kyrisikios' addressed in *Ep*. 28 is in fact a corruption of *Kyzikenos*, and is therefore the same Bishop John of Cyzicus.

In the first, Maximus offers counsel with respect to those under John's episcopal jurisdiction suffering some kind of fragmentation—perhaps as a result of the Persian invasion. He reminds John that, 'in accordance with the grace of the high-priesthood', it has fallen to him to be 'an imitator of the divine goodness on earth', and on that basis exhorts him to strive to 'gather together the scattered children of God into one' (John 11: 52), for this too is a mark (χαρακτήρ) of divine goodness. And since you are head (κεφαλή) of the precious body of the Church of God, join its members together with one another through the harmonious design of the Spirit. Having been made herald of the divine teachings, call with a loud voice those far and those near, and bind them to yourself with the indissoluble bond of the Spirit's love…. [34]

[34]*Ep*. 28 (PG 91. 621a).

In the second passage, Maximus cites certain 'interpreters of the divine mysteries' [35]

[35]Maximus may well have Dionysius in mind. See a similar idea expressed in Dion.Ar. *De ecc.hier*. 1.1; 1.5; 2.3.3 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 63.10-64.14; 67.16-68.4; 74.12-75.9).

who, using the adjective ελκτικὸ, liken the priesthood to the attractive or drawing power first of fire, then of God: **end p.171**

Physicists say that the force of fire draws up all the underlying material. In symbolically comparing God to fire, the interpreters of the divine mysteries say that he also draws up all who wish to obey his laws and who strive to live a pious life. And declaring the priesthood to be a picture which in image-form suitably portrays what it represents (ἐν εἰκόνι γραφὴν εὐφυῶς τὴν μίμησιν ἔχουσαν ὑπάρχειν λέγοντες τὴν ἱερωσύνην), they assert that it too, by the equally gracious law of compassion, draws up to God all who are under the same nature. [36]

[36]*Ep*. 30 (PG 91. 624b).

Maximus goes on to offer John specific injunctions on the basis of his appointment 'to bear (ἔχειν) the image of God on earth'. [37]

[37]*Ep*. 30 (PG 91. 624b).

In the third passage, also to John, very similar language is used, with the additional image of priest as pedagogue who leads receptive souls through sacramental initiation to perfect deification with God. Thus the priest, as mediator, presents God to earthly man, and offers deified man to God:

Just as the sun's rays suitably attract to it the healthy gaze which naturally delights in the light and impart their own brightness, so also the true priesthood—being through all a visible representation of the blessed Godhead to those on earth (χαρακτὴρ οὖσα διὰ πάντων τῆς μακαρίας θεότητος τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς)—draws to itself (ἐφέλκεται πρὸς ἑαυτὴν) every soul of devout and divine habit and imparts its own knowledge, peace and love, so that, having borne each faculty of the soul to the final limit of its proper activity, it may present to God as entirely deified those sacramentally initiated by it. [38]

[38]*Ep*. 31 (PG 91. 624d-625a).

And, he continues, this knowledge, peace, and love—the true goal of the soul's rational, concupiscible, and irascible faculties respectively—are the agents through which 'the true priesthood' reaches its own *telos*, which is 'to be deified and to deify' (θεοποιεῖσθαι τε καὶ θεοποιεῖν). [39]

[39]*Ep*. 31 (PG 91. 625a). Völker cites this passage as evidence in Maximus that 'the ascent to deification is…bound to the Church and its sacramental gifts as well as to the priesthood which distributes them.' *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 481.

This last phrase echoes Gregory Nazianzen's summary of the twofold mediatorial goal of the priesthood, namely, 'to be God and to deify' (θεὸν ἐσόμενον καὶ θεοποιήσοντα). [40]

[40]Greg.Naz. *Or*. 2.73.17-18 (SC 247. 186); see also Greg.Naz. *Or*. 2.22.14 (SC 247. 120), where the goal of the priest's art is θεὸν ποιῆσαι. **end p.172**

In the fourth passage, which again forms the theological basis for subsequent paraenesis, Maximus is addressing an unnamed 'most holy Bishop of Cydonia'. [41]

[41]*Ep*. 21 (PG 91. 604b-605c). Cydonia, on the north coast of Crete, is the modern-day Chania.

The monk's high praise for him stems from the bishop's perfect imitation of the mystery of God's saving economy in paradoxically uniting in himself 'sublimity' and 'humility'. This Christ-like joining of transcendent divine qualities with bodily human nature—so that each becomes visible through the other—is to Maximus' mind especially appropriate to the incumbent bishop, 'since God ordained the priesthood to represent him on earth to ensure that he may not cease being seen bodily and that his mysteries may not cease appearing to those with eyes to see'. [42]

[42]*Ep*. 21 (PG 91. 604d).

In summary of these four passages, Maximus defines the office of the priesthood/episcopacy in christological terms. Like Christ, the bishop is head of the Church, the body of believers under his oversight. Their unity in him is established and preserved through his proclamation of divine doctrine and his active exercise of divine love. As the χαρακτήρ and εἰκών of God, words with clear christological import, [43]

[43]See Col. 1: 15; Heb. 1: 3. It should be noted, however, that Maximus' use of the word χαρακτήρ in association with the priesthood, as in Gregory Nazianzen, involves nothing of the later Tridentine notion of a priestly *character indelibilis*. See André de Halleux, 'Grégoire de Nazianze, témoin du «caractère sacerdotal»?' in id., *Patrologie et Œcuménisme, Recueil D'Études* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 693-709.

he communicates heavenly, divine realities on earth, bodily, and more specifically, visibly. It is to the eyes more than to any other sense that the priest presents God, [44]

[44]A fact also noted by Irénée-Henri Dalmais, 'Mystère Liturgique et Divinisation dans la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur', in Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: Mélanges Patristiques Offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 56.

for they are the physical organ by which the mind penetrates sensible phenomena to apprehend exclusively intelligible realities. In turn, the priest draws to himself all those under his care and presents them, perfectly deified, to God. While the actual person of the priest and his mediatorial function are in no way viewed as though incumbent and office were separable, it is chiefly in his role as one who renders visible the divine 'mysteries' that he is most truly the bodily image of God on earth. **end p.173**

There is also much more to this 'drawing' than may at first meet the eye. [45]

[45]The verb ἕλκειν is translated in these contexts by Völker with 'sich anziehen' (*Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 140-1).

The term echoes Jesus' words in John 12: 32 about his impending priestly activity on the cross: 'And when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw (ελκύσω) all people to myself.' But Maximus' immediate source of inspiration for its use is more likely Dionysius the Areopagite. In Dionysius the word comprehends the totality of the function of the Church's sacerdotal office in which the hierarch—the bishop—serves as a mediating ray for the assimilation to God of all the orderly ranks under him. This of course indicates that Dionysius, and Maximus following him, understood the notion of hierarchy differently from the way it is popularly understood today: [46]

[46]Dionysius is repeatedly slighted in many quarters for introducing to the medieval Church of the West, through Aquinas, a hierarchical view of ministry in which 'service' is allegedly 'swallowed up by authority'. See, for instance, Paul Philibert, 'Issues for a Theology of Priesthood: A Status Report', in Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido (eds.), *The Theology of Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 17-19.

Hierarchy is, to my mind, a sacred order, knowledge and activity, which involves being assimilated to likeness with God as much as possible and, in response to the illuminations that are given it from God, is raised to the imitation of him in its own measure…. The

purpose of hierarchy, then, is to bring about assimilation to God and, as far as possible, union with him.[47]

[47]Dion.Ar. *De coel.hier*. 3.1-2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 17.3-11).

Andrew Louth comments on the meaning of this passage in the context of Dionysius' [Denys'] broader vision of the ecclesial and celestial orders:

[Hierarchy] is, certainly, a matter of order (τάξι), but for Denys it is much more. The hierarchy itself is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and activity (ἐνέργεια), and has a purpose: that of drawing into union with and assimilation to God all that belongs to it…. [H]ierarchy has a healing purpose. Far from being a structure of ordered and repressive authority, hierarchy for Denys is an expression of the love of God for everything that derives from him—that is, everything—a love that seeks to draw everything back into union with the source of all being. Hierarchy is the theophany of God's love that beings are.[48]

[48]Andrew Louth, 'Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite', *Hermathena* 165 (1998), 78.

end p.174

With this background in mind we can better appreciate the full, cosmic scope of Maximus' understanding of the 'drawing' purpose of the priesthood. At the same time it may allow us to make clearer sense of Maximus' conception of hierarchy when we come to consider it more closely in the next section.

We move now to another passage which sheds further light on this central notion of the priest as one in whose headship, teaching, love, and ritual actions God is presented visibly and bodily on earth and all the members of the body are drawn together and united in God. It appears in Anastasius' record of Maximus' first trial in 655.[49]

[49]For details on authorship and dating, see Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *Scripta Saeculi VII Vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia* (CCSG 39, Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. xv.

There we discover why it is Maximus would have the Emperor, who in this case was bent on enforcing the notorious *Typos*, excluded from the task of defining catholic doctrine. The text shows itself to be an important part of our investigation when we see with Maximus that the unity and mediatorial vocation of the Church are grounded in the orthodoxy of its public confession of saving dogma, a confession which is itself defined and regulated exclusively by the Church's priests and bishops. Having asserted as much, the aged Confessor was asked whether every Christian emperor is not also a priest and therefore also possesses the right to determine dogma, to which he replied:

He is not, for neither does he stand at the altar nor after the consecration of the bread does he elevate it saying, 'Holy things for the holy.' Nor does he baptize, or perform the rite of chrismation, or ordain and make bishops and priests and deacons; nor does he anoint churches, or wear the symbols of the priesthood, the omophorion[50]

[50]'The omophorion of the Greek Rite…corresponds to the Latin pallium, with the difference that in the Greek Rite its use is a privilege not only of archbishops, but of all bishops.' Joseph Braun, 'Pallium', in Charles G. Herbermann *et al*. (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, xi (London, 1913), 429.

and the Gospel book, in the way in which he wears, as symbols of kingship, the crown and purple robe.[51]

[51]*RM* 183-90 (CCSG 39. 27).

Appealing to the Church's *lex orandi* Maximus here indirectly affords us an insight into elements he considers constitutive of the priestly/episcopal office. It is with reference to the opening words of this passage that Robert Taft speculates that Maximus 'obviously

views [the elevation] as a rite of some significance, **end p.175** even emblematic of the priestly ministry'. [52]

[52]Robert F. Taft, 'The Precommunion Elevation of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62 (1996), 31.

It is apparently the theophanic moment of unveiling the eucharistic gifts at which the priest, at least in the rite known to Germanus in the eighth century, exhorts 'Behold, see! God is here!…God is the holy one who abides with the saints!' (βλέπετε, θεωρ ε̂ ιτε· ἰδοὺ ὁΘε΄ ο ·… Θε΄ ο ἐστιν ὅ΄΄αγιο ἐν ἁγίοι ἀναπαυ΄ ομενο). [53]

[53]Chapter 43 in Paul Meyendorff (ed. and trans.), *St Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 104. While I have taken ἁγίοι as the masculine plural, the expression invites being understood as 'in the holy things', that is, in the sacramental elements, or 'among the holy ones', that is, the angelic beings, or else 'in the sanctuary', as it is used sometimes in LXX (cf. Ps. 150: 1; Isa. 57: 15; Ezek. 44: 11).

While in his *Mystagogia* Maximus omits any mention of this particular moment in the eucharistic rite, which falls between the 'Our Father' and the congregational hymn 'One is Holy', it appears when his model mystagogue, Dionysius the Areopagite, makes at least three references to the elevation in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, introducing it with formulaic regularity as the bishop's performance of 'the most divine acts': '[Then] the hierarch performs the most divine acts and elevates the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols.' [54]

[54]Dion.Ar. *De ecc.hier*. (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 81.6-7; 90.9-10; 92.17-18).

If all we had to go on was this passage from Dionysius and the statement from Maximus' trial we could do no more than speculate with Father Taft about the 'emblematic' status of the elevation in Maximus' understanding of the priestly office. But coupled with the testimony of Germanus, it cannot be insignificant that in the *Mystagogia* itself, when he comes to praise the communion (ἡ μετάδοσι) as the *telos* of the whole synaxis, Maximus writes how at that point—which immediately follows the elevation—the worshippers themselves 'beholding the light of the invisible and ineffable glory become, together with the powers above, capable of receiving (δεκτικοὶ) the blessed purity'. [55]

[55]*Myst*. 21 (Sotiropoulos 210.8-10).

Combined with the material cited above from the *Epistulae* may we not plausibly suggest that the reason Maximus cites this moment first in a series of episcopal functions is because he regards the action of the priest, in the movement from standing before the altar to lifting before the eyes of the saints Christ's holy body, as somehow constitutive of his **end p.176** mediatorial office through which the worthy are united to God? Surely we are justified in affirming that Maximus explicitly locates the significance of priesthood at the altar (θυσιαστηρίῳ), in the elevation, with the proclamation τὰ ΄΄αγια τοι ἁγίοι !, because there above all is the priest most visibly and definitively what he is appointed to be: the mediating servant by which worthy individuals attain a holy communion. There he most closely resembles Christ the mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2: 5), 'who through his flesh makes manifest to human beings the incomprehensible Father, and through the Spirit leads those reconciled in himself to the Father'. [56]

[56]*Or.dom*. 71-4 (CCSG 23, 30).

There he most explicitly manifests the two principal tasks which, according to Gregory Nazianzen, have been entrusted to him: 'the protection of souls' (ψυχῶν προστασίαν) [57]

[57]The word προστασία carries a range of meanings: oversight, care, leadership, patronage. A προστάτη in Graeco-Roman society was a patron which, for Gregory, essentially meant a protector of the weak. See the comments of Jean Bernardi (ed. and trans.), *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 1-3* (SC 247, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 47-8.

and 'the mediation between God and man' (μεσιτείαν θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων). [58]

[58]Greg.Naz. *Or*. 2.17-18 (SC 247. 208).

THE RANKS OF THE CHURCH: ORDAINED BY THE ONE SPIRIT

A second point arising from the statement made in Maximus' trial, and one most pertinent to our topic, is the question of ecclesial ranks. The passages cited thus far indicate that for Maximus there is no essential difference between the priesthood (ἡ ἱερωσύνη) and the high-priesthood (ἡ ἀρχιερωσύνη). Or putting it another way, Christ's priesthood embraces both the priestly and episcopal office as one. However, Maximus does make a clear distinction between clerical and lay offices. And within this framework of ecclesiastical order the Emperor stands alongside the laity. Maximus is recorded as noting that in the intercessory lists included in the eucharistic anaphora, the Emperor is remembered with the laity *after* all the clerical ranks, implying therefore his subordination to that unifying episcopal authority exercised most definitively in the bishops' defining of doctrine and their presiding at the eucharist. 'During the holy anaphora at the holy altar, the emperors are **end p.177** remembered with the laity after the bishops and priests and deacons and the whole priestly rank when the deacon says, "And those laymen who have died in faith, Constantine, Constans,…" and the others. Thus he makes remembrance of living emperors after all the clergy.' [59]

[59]*RM* 200-6 (CCSG 39. 27).

We have already encountered the existence of ranks in connection with our study in Chapter 1 of 'proportionate revelation' and the ascent from *praxis* through *theoria* to *theologia* in the *Chapters on Theology*. There we saw within a more consciously monastic milieu how and why Maximus distinguishes between 'initiates' or 'beginners' (οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι, οἱ νηπίοι) and 'the perfect' (οἱ τελειώθεντε, οἱ τελείοι), [60]

[60]*Th.Oec*. 1.97 (PG 90. 1121c-1124a); 2.13 (PG 90. 1129c-1132a); 2.28 (PG 90. 1137bc); *Q.Thal*. 10.6-24 (CCSG 7. 83). Note the contrast between νήπιοι and the ἀνὴρ τέλειον in Ephesians 4: 13-14.

or between the respective spiritual ranks of πιστό, μαθητή, and ἀπόστολο. [61]

[61]*Th.Oec*. 1.33-4 (PG 90. 1096a-c).

In no way does this existence of a hierarchy of different ranks within the Church contradict the fundamental baptismal unity announced by St Paul in Galatians 3: 28, a central text in Maximian theology: 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ'. On the contrary, it is precisely by way of differing ecclesial ranks, themselves χαρίσματα of the one Holy Spirit, that the unity of

the Church is preserved. Maximus makes this clear when he is asked by the priest Thalassius to reconcile an apparent biblical discrepancy in which St Paul allegedly disobeys the Spirit. [62]

[62] *Q.Thal*. 29.1-72 (CCSG 7. 211-15).

How was the Apostle's journey to Jerusalem justified when the Tyrian disciples, speaking 'by the Spirit', urged him not to go (cf. Acts 21: 4)?

Maximus begins his reply by referring to Isaiah 11: 1-3 where the prophet lists seven 'spirits', by which Isaiah does not infer that there are seven spirits of God, but that the 'energies of one and the same Holy Spirit' are said to be 'spirits' since the same 'actuating Holy Spirit exists wholly and complete in each energy proportionately'. [63]

[63] *Q.Thal*. 29.9-12 (CCSG 7. 211).

These 'diverse energies' also include the 'diverse gifts' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12: 4, again given by one and the same Spirit. The Spirit distributes these gifts in proportion to each person's faith, and by participating in the gift that person receives **end p.178** the corresponding energy or activity of the Spirit, thus enabling him to fulfil particular commandments.

Returning to the problem in hand, Maximus first distinguishes between Paul's gift of 'love for God' and the disciples' gift of 'love for Paul':

Paul disobeyed them because he regarded the love which is divine and beyond understanding as incomparably superior to the spiritual love which the others had for him. And in fact he did not go up disobeying them at all, but rather by his own example he drew (ϵλκων) them—who prophesied through the energy of the Spirit which was in due proportion given to them according to the gift of grace—towards that yearning desire for him who is beyond all. [64]

[64] *Q.Thal*. 29.43-9 (CCSG 7. 213).

This first distinction is based on the twofold divine command of love for God and love for neighbour, which in no way admits any division or separation. Still, the one is subordinate to the other. Maximus then introduces a second distinction—that between 'the prophetic gift' (τὸ προφητικὸν χάρισμα) and 'the apostolic gift' (τὸ ἀποστολικὸν χάρισμα). The latter is superior to the former, since it has in mind the whole divine *skopos*:

Since the prophetic gift is inferior to the apostolic gift, it was not appropriate to the Word who governs the universe (τὸ παν) and assigns each one his due office (τὴν εκάστου διορίζοντο τάξιν) for the superior to submit to the inferior, but rather for the inferior to follow after the superior. For those who prophesied through the prophetic spirit in them—not the apostolic spirit—revealed the way in which St Paul would suffer for the Lord. But he, looking only towards the divine purpose (πρὸ μόνον ἀφορων τὸν θειον σκοπόν), regarded as nothing all that would intervene. He was concerned not to survive that which would befall him, but to become another Christ through the imitation of Christ and by accomplishing all that for the sake of which Christ in his love for humankind chose life in the flesh in his economy. [65]

[65] *Q.Thal*. 29.54-66 (CCSG 7. 213-15).

Any question of opposition between various ranks is therefore done away with, since they are seen to be arranged by divine reason (the Logos) and are related to the entire economies of cosmic and salvific order. Consequently the alleged 'disobedience' of the Apostle, concludes Maximus, is in fact

a guardian of the good order (εὐταξία φυλακή) which arranges and governs all sacred matters, and which keeps each person from falling away from his
end p.179

own abode and foundation (μονῆς καὶ ἱδρύσεως). It also teaches clearly that the ranks of the Church which the Spirit has fittingly assigned (τοὺς καλῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος διωρισμένους τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ βαθμοὺς) are not to be confused with one another.[66]

[66]*Q.Thal*. 29.67-72 (CCSG 7. 215).

From here I do not think it too great a leap to move to the contended question in Maximus' theology of the status of the Church of Rome. On this point we must ask whether the external, charismatic hierarchy which as we have seen guards and preserves the Church's ordered harmony extends to a ranking of different episcopal sees. If for Maximus such an order is essential to each member's harmonious preservation in the whole body—if there is no opposition, but rather a necessary correlation between ordered ranks in the Church and the Church's fundamental unity—then we might expect to find that he reckons entirely acceptable the extension to one particular church of a divinely given rank of pre-eminence over the others.

This whole subject has been studied extensively by Larchet,[67]

[67]We shall draw in large part from the briefer comments in his Introduction to Emmanuel Ponsoye's French translation of the *Opuscula* in *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 7-108. For a full treatment of each relevant text with the necessary historical background, see Jean Claude Larchet, *Maxime le Confesseur, médiateur entre l'Orient et l'Occident* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 125-201.

who refutes and clarifies some of the lofty claims made by Dominicans Alain Riou[68]

[68]*Le Monde et L'Église.*

and Juan-Miguel Garrigues.[69]

[69]'Le sens de la primauté romaine selon Maxime le Confesseur', *Istina* 21 (1976), 6-24.

Larchet rightly rejects any appraisal of Maximus as a proto-champion of the medieval papacy. He argues that Maximus' defence of Popes Honorius (625-38)[70]

[70]*Opusc*. 20 (PG 91. 237c-245d).

and Theodore I (642-9)[71]

[71]*Opusc*. 10 (PG 91. 133d-136c).

stems primarily from his conviction that their language was capable of admitting an orthodox interpretation and indeed, we might add, despite weaknesses in their choice of words, was intended to do so. But what of the unambiguous exaltation extended to the Roman See in the two incomplete texts that survive as *Opuscula* 11 and 12? Larchet has pointed out that the second of these texts,[72]

[72]PG 91. 144a-d.

both of which are no more than extracts preserved by the ninth-century librarian and member of the papal curia Anastasius **end p.180** (d. *c*. 878),[73]

[73]For a brief précis of Anastasius Bibliothecarius' life and work, see Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), pp. xxvi-xxx.

is extant only in Latin and of potentially dubious authenticity. Even so, '[s]etting aside questions of textual authenticity and accuracy of translation from the Greek original', he writes,

one notes first of all that Maximus does not establish strictly speaking an equivalence between the Catholic Church and the See of Rome, but…affirms the recognition that the Church of Rome, engaged in the controversy to defend the orthodox faith, represents that faith in a way the Church of Constantinople, fallen in heresy, does not. And it is only to the degree that the Church of Rome confesses the orthodox faith that she may be considered the universal Church. [74]

[74]Larchet, Introduction to Ponsoye, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques*, 74.

The authenticity of the second text, *Opuscula* 11, while more commonly accepted, can also not be regarded as entirely free from doubt. It is generally thought to have been penned by Maximus in Rome soon after the Lateran synod in 649. Before we hear from Larchet, let us place before our eyes the whole of the disputed passage:

For the very ends of the earth and those in every part of the world who purely and rightly confess the Lord look directly to the most holy Church of the Romans and its confession and faith as though it were a sun of unfailing light, expecting from it the illuminating splendour of the Fathers and the sacred dogmas, just as the divinely-inspired and sacred six synods (ἅγιαι ἑξ σύνοδοι) have purely and piously decreed, declaring most expressly the symbol of faith. For ever since the incarnate Word of God came down to us, all the churches of Christians everywhere have held that greatest Church there (αὐτόθι) to be their sole base and foundation (μόνην κρηπῖδα καὶ θεμέλιον), since on the one hand, it is in no way overcome by the gates of Hades, according to the very promise of the Saviour (Matt. 16: 18-19), but holds the keys of the orthodox confession and faith in him and opens the only true and real religion to those who approach with godliness, and on the other hand, it shuts up and locks every heretical mouth that speaks unrighteousness against the Most High. For that which was founded and built by the creator and master of the universe himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his disciples and apostles, and following them the holy fathers and teachers and martyrs consecrated by their own words and deeds, and by their agony and sweat, suffering and bloodshed, and finally by their violent death for the catholic and apostolic Church of us who believe in **end p.181** him, they strive to destroy through two words (διὰ δύο ρημάτων) [uttered] without effort and without death—O the patience and forbearance of God!—and [so seek] to annul the great ever-radiant and ever-lauded mystery of the orthodox worship of Christians. [75]

[75]PG 91. 137c-140b.

According to Larchet, who provisionally accepts Maximian authorship, what the Confessor has to say in this text 'is explained…in large part by the historical circumstances and by those of his own life'. [76]

[76]Introduction to Ponsoye, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques*, 107.

In other words, Maximus''enthusiasm' here is coloured by the fact that as a political refugee he had found protection and support in the western empire generally and in the Church of Rome in particular when she alone was confessing the true faith against the Monotheletist policy endorsed by the Imperium. In Larchet's words, the eminence with which the Confessor regards the Roman See 'chiefly relies on the fact that she has confessed the orthodox faith and defended it against heresies'. [77]

[77]Ibid.

A closer reading of the text however reveals that according to its author's own explicitly *theological* reasoning, the eminence of the Church of Rome for its confession of faith is

not independent of its pre-eminence on the basis of the promise of Christ—of which Rome is the primary and representative recipient. The locative adverb αὐτόθι (here; there; in this or that specific place) indicating Rome is immediately linked to Christ's promise of the Church's inviolability against the gates of Hades and the conferral of the keys upon Peter (Matt. 16: 18-19). We can only presume that to the author's way of thinking, the Church in Rome holds these keys for no other reason than what was accepted universally as the Petrine connection to Rome, a connection first made explicit by Irenaeus, [78]

[78]Iren. *Haer*. 3.3.2.15-29 (SC 211. 32). I take the two celebrated phrases in Ign. *Rom*.—one in which Ignatius addresses the Church that προκάθηται ἐν τόπῳ χωρίου Ρωμαίων (SC 10. 104), and the other (SC 10. 112) in which he commands the Roman Christians οὐχ ὡς Πέτρο καὶ Παυλο, who were Apostles, but as a convict—as evidence of an earlier (*c*. 110), but implicit recognition of the same connection.

referred to at the Council of Sardica (*c*.343), [79]

[79]Canon 3: 'But if perchance sentence be given against a bishop in any matter and he supposes his case to be not unsound but good, in order that the question may be reopened, let us, if it seem good to your charity, honour the memory of Peter the Apostle, and let those who gave judgement write to Julius, the bishop of Rome, so that, if necessary, the case may be retried by the bishops of the neighbouring provinces and let him appoint arbiters.' Trans. Percival, 417. Before this time it appears there may have been claims made by individual Roman bishops to a Petrine succession for their office. The famous though not undisputed cases are that of Pope Calixtus I (d. 223) in connection with Tertullian's polemic to a nameless bishop in *De pudicitia* 21, and that of Pope Stephen I (d. 257), who, in an extract preserved by Cyprian of Carthage (Cyp. *Ep*. 74.17), was accused by Firmilian of Caesarea of claiming to possess the chair of Peter 'through succession' (see Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 394).

developed by **end p.182** Leo I (440-61), [80]

[80]See Walter Ullmann, 'Leo I and the Theme of Papal Primacy', in Everett Ferguson *et al*. (eds.), *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 359-85.

and exploited from very early on [81]

[81]In a recent article Brian Daley notes that 'excavations carried out under the Vatican basilica in the 1940s confirm that Christians were venerating Peter's remains there, with great devotion, from at least the 160s'. See 'The Ministry of Primacy and the Communion of Churches', in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Church Unity and the Papal Office* (Grand Rapids, Mich., and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 37.

through the establishment of a shrine at the Apostle's tomb and its promotion as a holy place for pilgrimage. [82]

[82]In *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 87-8, Peter Brown records how the young prince Justinian's request for a fragment of Peter's remains was flatly denied. Instead, he received a handkerchief that had been lowered into the crypt and brought out 'heavy with the blessing of St Peter'.

Upon his concession to Maximus in the dispute in Carthage in July of 645, Pyrrhus drew precisely that connection when he expressed his desire 'to be deemed worthy first of venerating the shrines of the Apostles—or rather those of the chiefs (κορυφαίων) of the Apostles themselves [Peter and Paul], and then of seeing the face of the most-holy Pope'. [83]

[83]*DP* (PG 91. 352d-353a).

According to *Opusculum* 11 then, Rome's pre-eminence is not seen exclusively to be conditional upon the orthodoxy of its confession, but is also bound up with the promise of Christ, his bestowal of the keys to the Church in the person of Peter, and the succession of Peter's episcopacy located in Rome.

Thus there can be no question about the essential meaning of the text, nor does its ecclesiology necessarily furnish any real doubts about Maximian authorship. For Maximus, Peter is 'the all-holy, the great foundation (κρηπί) of the Church'. [84]

[84] *Q.Thal*. 27.114-15 (CCSG 7. 197). In specifically identifying Peter as the ἀκρ ότατο and κορυφαιο of the Apostles (*Q.Thal*. 59.171-2 (CCSG 22. 55); 61.272 (CCSG 22. 101)) Maximus expresses the common mind of the Byzantine tradition both before and for a good while after him. See John Meyendorff, 'St. Peter in Byzantine Theology', in id. *et al*. (eds.), *The Primacy of Peter* (London: Faith Press, 1963), 7-29.

His is the 'reverent **end p.183** confession, against which the wicked mouths of the heretics, gaping like the gates of hell, never prevail'. [85]

[85] *Ep*. 13 (PG 91. 512b).

It appears that Maximus also accepts communion with the Roman See as a critical factor, properly inseparable from 'the right confession of the faith', in the realization of the unity of the Church. When, according to the record of the debate which took place in August 656 while Maximus was in exile in Bizya, [86]

[86] Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), p. xv.

Bishop Theodosius, imperial and patriarchal legate, proffers superficial acceptance of Maximus' position and offers to confirm it in writing, Maximus directs him and his associates—'that is, the Emperor and the Patriarch and the synod convoked by him'—instead to 'send a written account to this effect to Rome as the canon stipulates'. [87]

[87] *DB* 432-4 (CCSG 39. 113). The canon to which Maximus here refers is presumably canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council (see Tanner, 8). The (earlier?) Apostolic canon 32 (Percival, 595-6) is like it: 'if any presbyter or deacon has been excommunicated by a bishop, he may not be received into communion again by any other than by him who excommunicated him…'.

His summary recommendation is for the Emperor and the Patriarch themselves to forward to the Pope of Rome 'an exhortatory dispatch' and 'a conciliar petition' respectively so that, 'if indeed you are found to be turning to the way of the Church on account of your right confession of the faith, you may be reconciled…'. [88]

[88] *DB* 445-50 (CCSG 39. 115).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding Maximus' continuity with the tradition's general acceptance of communion with the Roman See and its bishop as a normal condition of Church unity, *Opusculum* 11 does present one peculiar and unaccountable phrase that raises unavoidable questions of textual authenticity. We are referring to the expression, 'the sacred six synods' or councils. [89]

[89] The words 'synod' and 'council' translate the same Greek word.

According to the seventeenth-century Dominican patrologist François Combéfis, the 'six synods' mentioned in the text include the Lateran synod of 649 in Rome, which he assumes Maximus must have regarded as on a par with the five councils by that time generally ragarded as 'ecumenical': Nicaea (325), Constantinople **end p.184** (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), and Chalcedon II (553). This assumption has acquired nearly universal acceptance.

There is in principle no reason why Maximus might not have thought of the Lateran synod as a truly 'ecumenical' synod. It was convoked by the Pope himself, brought together bishops from around the inhabited world, confessed the true faith and rejected error in accordance with the dogmatic tradition enshrined in the great councils of the past. But does Maximus anywhere else give any indication that he thought of the Lateran synod as a universal synodical gathering on a par with the five synods generally accepted as ecumenical? We should first ask whether he could have gained that impression from the synod itself—though it seems those councils subsequently called 'ecumenical' never actually set out with a self-conscious view of their status as such. [90]

[90]This of course raises the much-disputed question as to what constitutes an 'ecumenical' council or synod. There is one passage in Maximus' trial that perhaps indicates a prevailing belief that a synod's validity depended on its being convoked or authorized by the Pope, given, that is, his legitimate possession of office. When mention is made of the doctrinal authority of the Lateran synod in Rome, one of Maximus' accusers, Demosthenes, with reference to Pope Martin I's arrest, trial, and exile at the hands of the Imperium, counters with the cry, 'The synod has not been ratified since the one who summoned it has been deposed.' To which Maximus calmly replies, 'He was not deposed, but banished. What synodal and canonical act is there among the things accomplished that firmly attests his deposition?' *RM* 457-63 (CCSG 39. 47-9).

The *Acta* of the Lateran synod of 649 are recorded simply as 'the proceedings of the holy and apostolic synod conducted in this illustrious and venerable [city] Rome'. [91]

[91]Riedinger, *ACO* i. 2.3-4. This titular form also occurs in Anastasius' *DB* 416-17 (CCSG 39. 111) where Maximus is recorded as pointing out patristic citations from τὴν βίβλον τῶν πεπραγμένων τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ἀποστολικῆς συνόδου Ῥώμη.

That is, they appear to regard the synod as 'one of the normal bi-annual provincial synods as visualized by Nicaea 1 (canon 5)'. [92]

[92]J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 20.

Riedinger grants it a more modest status yet, going so far as to suggest that it was little more than a meeting convoked to approve the Latin translation of already existing Greek documents. His basis for such a view rests on the fact that no actual debate or discussion took place. [93]

[93]Rudolph Riedinger, 'Griechische Konzilsakten auf dem Wege ins lateinische Mittelalter', *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 9 (1977), 255-7; cited by Bronwen Neil, 'The Monothelite Controversy and Its Christology' (MATR dissertation, University of Durham, 1998), 19. end p.185

When later the validity of this 'synod of Rome' is questioned by several of Maximus' interrogators, he gives no indication that he thinks of it at that stage as bearing the illustrious title 'ecumenical'. [94]

[94]*RM* 250-63 (CCSG 39. 31-3); 428-68 (CCSG 39. 45-9); *DB* 234-60 (CCSG 39. 95-7).

Yet his mention of 'four synods' in his trial is qualified by the adjective οἰκουμενικαὶ, [95]

[95]*RM* 253 (CCSG 39. 31).

as we find in an earlier treatise where he speaks of 'the holy five ecumenical synods'. [96]

[96]*Opusc*. 9 (PG 91. 128b).

And in a work written after his death by followers dearly dedicated to the primacy of the Roman See, we find no signs of their exploiting Maximus' alleged recognition of the Lateran synod as on a par with the first five ecumenical councils, but instead find distinguished 'the five holy and ecumenical synods' and 'the holy and most pious apostolic synod convoked in Rome'. [97]

[97]*Hypom*. 225-32 (CCSG 39. 213).

Combéfis may well be right. Yet it is not entirely impossible that a later writer with certain sympathies towards the Roman See—perhaps even Anastasius Bibliothecarius himself—composed and inserted the fragment we have come to know as *Opusculum* 11 in the Maximian corpus. Interestingly enough, after his own attempt to install himself to the papal office by unlawful means and his subsequent deposition, Anastasius became 'unofficial secretary and private adviser' [98]

[98]Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), p. xxvii.

to Pope Nicholas I (858-67) who, in the polemical context generated by his debate with Photius and questions of a more juridical nature, asserted the traditionally accepted eminence of Rome with no uncertain rigour in language remarkably similar to our own *Opusculum* 11. It is also interesting to note that at this stage—well after the Second Council of Nicaea (787)—it would apparently have been entirely normal for those allied with the Church of Rome to refer with Pope Nicholas to the authority of 'sex universalium conciliorum'. [99]

[99]See *Nicolai I. Papae epistolae* 91.17; 92.34-5; 98.18 (E. Perels (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Epistolarum*, vi. iv. *Epistolae Karolini Aeui* (Berlin, 1925), 520, 539, 558).

None of these speculations pretends to prove anything positive, nor do I possess either the evidence or competence to offer a firm verdict on text-critical questions at this stage. What can be said is that any conclusions regarding the authenticity of *Opusculum* 11 **end p.186** will have to settle the question of the 'six synods', a task that might also be helped by a certain identification of the 'two words' referred to towards the end of the text, a reference no commentator to my knowledge has yet addressed. [100]

[100]My hunch would be to suggest that, supposing *Opusc*. 11 to be at least contemporary with Maximus, the phrase refers to the Imperial *Ekthesis* and the *Typos*, both of which were condemned at the Lateran synod; in which case the Greek would better be translated as 'two statements'.

In the final analysis, furthermore, one's interpretation of *Opusculum* 11 must be qualified by what we come across later in Maximus' life in two sets of statements which could be said definitively to represent his mature ecclesiology. In the first, from the *Disputatio Bizyae*, Bishop Theodosius is found to be trying amicably but unsuccessfully to persuade Maximus to submit to the *Typos* and return to fellowship with the Church (of Constantinople). It becomes evident that Maximus' resistance is rooted not in a pedantic dogmatism [101]

[101]*Pace* Greek historian A. N. Stratos, who, charging Maximus with 'resolute obstinacy', derives his resistance from 'his aristocratic background, combined with a monastic and senile stubbornness…'. Quoted by George C. Berthold, 'The Church as Mysterion: Diversity and Unity According to Maximus the Confessor', *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987), 20.

but in an understanding of a divinely instituted order of ecclesial and doctrinal authority in which the teaching of the apostles and prophets, recorded in Scripture and mediated through the Church's bishops and councils, itself conveys what is constitutive for the reception of divine life. To receive their teaching is to receive them, and to receive them is to receive Christ. To receive anything contrary to their teaching, such as the *Typos*, no matter what its source or medium, is to reject them and receive instead the devil. Maximus explains this at length to Theodosius in words that could scarcely be stronger:

What kind of believer accepts a dispensation silencing the very words which the God of all ordained to be spoken by the apostles and prophets and teachers? Let us investigate, reverend master, what kind of evil this summary blindly arrives at. For if 'God appointed in the Church first apostles, then prophets, and third teachers' (1 Cor. 12: 28) 'for the

perfecting of the saints' (Eph. 4: 12), having said in the Gospel to the apostles and through them to those after them, 'What I say to you, I say to all' (Mark 13: 37), and again, 'He who receives you receives me, and he who rejects you rejects me' (Luke 10: 16), it is clearly manifest that whoever does not receive the apostles and prophets and teachers, but rejects their words, rejects Christ himself. **end p.187**

Let us also investigate the other passage. God chose to raise up apostles and prophets and teachers for the perfecting of the saints. But in order to oppose godly religion the devil chose to raise up false apostles and false prophets and false teachers, so that the old law was opposed, as was also the evangelical law. And as far as I understand it the false apostles and false prophets and false teachers are the heretics alone, whose words and train of thought are distorted. Consequently, just as the one who receives the true apostles and prophets and teachers receives God, likewise the one who receives false apostles and false prophets and false teachers receives the devil. So the one who throws out the saints along with the cursed and impure heretics—mark my words!—manifestly condemns God along with the devil.

If, in that case, in racking our brains to come up with new words in our own times we find those words to have descended to this extreme evil, watch out lest we—whilst alleging and proclaiming 'peace'—be found to be struck ill with the apostasy which the divine Apostle said beforehand would accompany the coming of the antichrist (2 Thess. 2: 3-4).

I have spoken this to you, my lords, without holding back…. With these things inscribed on the tablet of my heart, are you telling me to enter into fellowship with a church in which these [other] things are proclaimed, and to have communion with those who actually expel God and, I imagine, the devil with God? May God—who for my sake was made like me—sin excepted—never let this happen to me! [102]

[102] *DB* 181-218 (CCSG 39. 89-93).

Then on 19 April 658, [103]

[103] Following the dating proposed by Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), pp. xvi-xvii.

in a letter written from exile in Perberis to Anastasius—his faithful disciple of forty years—Maximus recounts his interrogation by legates of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Peter sent to persuade him to give in to Peter's own compromise Monotheletist/Monophysite formula. While up until this time it seems that subsequent Roman bishops at best stood only loosely by Pope Martin I's rejection of Monotheletism at the Lateran synod, the interrogators applied new pressure to Maximus by announcing that all five Patriarchates, including Rome, had joined in fellowship under the compromise formula: 'Which church do you belong to? Byzantium? Rome? Antioch? Alexandria? Jerusalem? Look here—all have been united along with the provinces under them! So if you belong to the catholic Church, be united, lest devising a novel and alien path by your way of life, you suffer what you least expect.' [104]

[104] *Ep. Max*. 4-8 (CCSG 39. 161). **end p.188**

Faced with such dire circumstances Maximus is forced to offer in reply what is surely his narrowest, most precise ecclesiological definition (and not simply a description!) in which the catholic Church is specifically equated with the orthodox confession of faith: 'The God of all declared the catholic Church to be the right and saving confession of faith in him when he blessed Peter on account of the terms with which he confessed him rightly.' [105]

[105]καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, τὴν ὀρθὴν καὶ σωτήριον τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως ὁμολογίαν, Πέτρον μακαρίσας ἐφ' οἷς αὐτὸν καλῶς ὡμολόγησεν, τὸν τῶν ὅλων εἶναι Θεὸν ἀπεφήνατο. See *Ep. Max*. 9-11 (CCSG 39. 161).

Peter here is no less yet no more than the archetypal and paradigmatic confessor of true faith in Christ. It is *eo ipso* 'the right and saving confession of faith in Christ/God' that constitutes the Church in its catholicity. Not even the Councils stand above this rule, since, as Theodosius at one point has to admit, 'it is as you say: the rightness of the dogmas judges the synods'. [106]

[106]*DB* 261-2 (CCSG 39. 97).

In following an apparent digression we have not lost sight of our primary point. To separate this definitive principle of ecclesial existence from the fully rounded (catholic) contours of its corporeal life would not be far removed from envisaging the life of the soul apart from its body. The universality of the Church's mediating vocation, constituted by its orthodox confession of faith in Christ, is properly inseparable from the specificity of its particular divinely given orders, ranks, and sacramental worship. There are signs here of what Peter Brown has described primarily with reference to the Latin west as the localization of the holy, [107]

[107]*Cult of the Saints*, 86.

though in our case it is as much structural as it is spatial. Regarding the external criteria of the Church's catholicity, Maximus clearly accepts the headship of Peter among the Apostles, the pre-eminence of the Church of Rome on account of its living Petrine office, and communion with its bishop as a given norm. He also accepts a temporal hierarchy in which Christ is mediated through the apostles and prophets and teachers (the Church's bishops), [108]

[108]Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 75; also Pelikan, "Council or Father or Scripture", 277-88.

and a local hierarchy of bishops, priests, deacons, monks and other lay orders, and initiates. There is no doubt that cut loose from its integral reference to the one Word and Spirit of God, such external specificity can only lend itself to diffusion and dissolution. So we find Maximus invoking

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the Apostle Paul 'through whom the Holy Spirit condemns even angels who institute anything contrary to the kerygma'. [109]

[109]*RM* 293-4 (CCSG 39. 35).

Yet through the harmony created by right faith active in love, the Church's hierarchical *ordo* is the means by which each individual component in the whole structure is able to participate in its unique, unchanging centre (κέντρον). [110]

[110]*Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 154.4).

It is the means by which the whole Church with each of its members rightly confesses the true faith. It is the means by which God is manifest bodily on earth. And so it is the means also to true ecclesial communion and personal deification. In the inspired vision of Dionysius who himself coined the term, 'sacred order' (*hierarchia*) is seen to be a gift bestowed upon the Church by the divine goodness itself 'to ensure the salvation and deification of every rational and intelligent being'. [111]

[111]*De ecc.hier*. 1.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, ii. 66.21-67.1).

SPIRITUAL TOPOGRAPHY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

With our interest in the Church as the *locus deificandi* and our reference just now to the 'localization of the holy', we are well situated to undertake a closer investigation of

Maximus' conception of τόπο and its relationship to somatic and ecclesiological concerns.[112]

[112]This theme has been the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Tamara Grdzelidze, 'The Concept of Place/Space in the Writings of Maximus the Confessor: Liturgical Space according to the Mystagogia' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1998). While at times I found Grdzelidze's theological analysis wanting, her background overview of liturgical details is quite helpful.

In our study of *Ambiguum* 7 in Chapter 2 we saw how Maximus speaks of the final state or position of the saved as being 'in God', their 'abode and foundation'. In the age to come, neither space nor time—both of which are created realities—are obliterated, but come to transcend their finite boundaries by their participation in the infinite God. 'Inspired by Gregory of Nyssa,' Blowers remarks, 'Maximus projects a zone of eternal sabbatical motion or "moving rest" in which the features of spatio-temporal extension [διάστημα] are gradually collapsed….'[113]

[113]'Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 22', *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997), 260. See also Plass, 'Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor', 263.

In this section **end p.190** we shall seek to demonstrate how it is through his use of the term *topos* that Maximus extends this vision to the ecclesial sphere.

In the biblical, philosophical, and patristic traditions, *topos* implies far more than the English words 'place' or 'space'. In the LXX *topos* translates the Hebrew *māqôm*, a term often used to evoke or designate a specific cultic locus at which people have been granted access to God's gracious presence. Thus Abraham prepares his son Isaac as a burnt offering at the 'place' indicated by the Lord (Gen. 22: 4), a mountain he eventually names 'The Lord has seen' (Gen. 22: 14). Upon waking from his dream at Bethel ('house of God') Jacob exclaims, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28: 17). In Exodus 'the place of God' is the mountain of theophany and heavenly communion (Exod. 24: 9-11). The Jerusalem Temple is the 'place' where God has put his name and where alone Israel is to worship (Deut. 12: 5-9). After its destruction in ad 70 (cf. John 11: 48), the early Church recognized Jesus himself—through his own name (Matt. 18: 20) and body (John 2: 19-22)—to be their 'place'. St John underscores the heavenly and trinitarian character of this new sanctuary when, evoking the image of a bridegroom anticipating union with his bride, he records Jesus speaking of going to prepare a 'place' for his disciples in his Father's house (John 14: 2-3; cf. *1 Clem*. 5: 4-7).

In his brief study on *topos* in late Neoplatonism,[114]

[114]*The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982).

Shmuel Sambursky has shown that such cultic and sacral inferences are not confined to the biblical sources. Remarking upon the effect of their tranquil, paradisaical surrounds on their conversation Socrates tells Phaedrus, 'this place seems to be a holy place'.[115]

[115]*Phaedrus* 238cd.

In commenting on the episode of Jacob's dream at Bethel, Philo gives three meanings for the term *topos*: it is the space (χώρα) filled up by a body, the divine *logos*, or God himself, since he encompasses all things but is not encompassed by anything.[116]

[116]*De somniis* i. 61-3 (F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (eds. and trans.), *Philo*, v (LCL, London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1934), 328).

Later in the Neoplatonic tradition, writes Sambursky, '[t]he central conception…was that the encompassed is supported by the encompassing, that secondary entities are always contained in

end p.191 primary ones and have their place in them'. [117]

[117]*The Concept of Place*, 16.

Topos is that space filled up by body, [118]

[118]Ibid., 25.

yet it is not merely a vacuum, an emptiness waiting to be filled, for 'the forces acting in space do not merely encompass bodies, but totally penetrate them'. [119]

[119]Ibid., 16.

In Maximus these sources converge to reveal an understanding of *topos* that is at once deeply rooted in cosmology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. For a start we should be reminded that the Confessor always considers spatial extension *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, from that eschatological perspective in which 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor. 15: 28). In other words, *topos* is ultimately equated with God himself since it refers to that space filled in the age to come by Christ's own incarnate complement, the Church, a body the Logos penetrates entirely. On the other hand, *topos* denotes a category inapplicable to God. He is not 'somewhere', but is beyond every 'where'. [120]

[120]*Q.Thal*. 61.320-5 (CCSG 22. 103); *Th.Oec*. 1.68 (PG 90. 1108c).

And yet since the psalmist knows God to be 'a strong place' (Ps. 70: 3), Maximus affirms—as an economic, teleological reality—that God will be the abode (μονή) and foundation (ἵδρυσι) of those being saved—their 'place'—'uncircumscribed, immeasurable and infinite'—'becoming all to all' (1 Cor. 9: 22; cf. 1 Cor. 15: 28). [121]

[121]*Q.Thal*. 61.328-30 (CCSG 22. 105)

Maximus cites as illustrative of this state the way the soul 'manifests itself in the limbs of a body as a subjective power at work in each limb, and through itself holds the limbs united for life together towards being'. [122]

[122]*Q.Thal*. 61.333-6 (CCSG 22. 105). Origen uses the same analogy with explicit reference to the relationship between the Logos and his body the Church (Or. *Cels*. 6.48 (SC 147. 298-300)).

In *Ambiguum* 7 we came across the same idea in connection with his anti-Origenist argument that while the Sabbath rest remains a yet-to-be-realized reality, it is already anticipated in this life by the virtuous. When such a person comes to be in God, 'he will no longer be moved away from his own place, since it is a state surrounded by stillness and calm. Hence God himself is the "place" of all those deemed worthy of such blessedness, as it is written, "be my God and protection, a strong place to save me" (Ps. 70: 3)'. [123]

[123]*Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1081a).

Elsewhere we gain further indication that this anticipated bliss is already realized in this age as a simultaneously personal and **end p.192** ecclesial experience. Hinting at John 12: 32 in the *Chapters on Theology*, Maximus tells how, 'when the Word of God is exalted in us through *praxis* and *theoria*, he draws (ἕλκει) all people to himself'. 'Therefore,' he goes on,

let him who beholds divine things ascend with zeal, following the Word until he attains the 'place' where he is. For there he 'draws' him, as Ecclesiastes says: 'he draws towards his place' (Eccles. 1: 5), clearly referring to those who follow him as the great high priest

who leads them into the holy of holies where, as one of us (τὸ καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς), he himself 'entered on our behalf as a forerunner' (Heb. 6: 20). [124]

[124] *Th.Oec*. 2.32 (PG 90. 1140b).

We may note how Maximus here weaves together the 'drawing' function of Christ's priesthood on our behalf and the notion of 'place' as the final destiny of such movement. Later he designates this same 'place' as the 'inheritance' (κληρονομία) and 'abode' (μονή) of those being saved, equating all three terms with 'the pure kingdom of God', 'the goal of those being moved through longing for the ultimate object of desire'. [125]

[125] *Th.Oec*. 2.86 (PG 90. 1165ab).

Yet it is especially in a brief passage from one of the *Quaestiones et dubia* [126]

[126] *QD* 173.1-16 (CCSG 10. 120).

that we see in continuity with Neoplatonic thought how *topos* indicates God as the 'space' filled by the body of Christ, which in turn is itself entirely penetrated by that space. The question seeks the meaning of the Pauline phrase, 'the fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα) of him who is filled all in all' (Eph. 1: 23). *Pleroma* is a pregnant word whose meaning 'totality', 'content', or 'unity'—as distinct from multiplicity or partiality—lends itself as a metaphorical [127]

[127] I use this word qualifiedly in the positive sense defended by Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

cosmo-spatial term to convey the 'totality' of divine life in Christ (Col. 1: 19; 2: 9), and of christic life in the cosmic Church (Eph. 3: 19; 4: 10). [128]

[128] See G. Delling, 'πλήρωμα', in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vii, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 298-305. See also the excellent study by Pierre Benoit, 'Body, Head and Pleroma in the Epistles of the Captivity', in id., *Jesus and the Gospel*, ii, trans. Benet Weatherhead (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 51-92.

For the Stoics it functioned as an anti-dualist term signifying the mutual compenetration of the divine soul and the whole material cosmos. [129]

[129] Benoit, 'Body, Head and Pleroma', 83.

Here in Ephesians 1: 23 it appears in immediate apposition to τὸ σῶμα of Christ and, indirectly, to the

end p.193 Church. Presumably it is the passive form (πληρουμένου) of the verb πληροῦν which poses the interpretative problem. [130]

[130] Benoit notes that the passive sense rather than the middle is supported by philology and the Fathers ('Body, Head and Pleroma', 90).

It is remarkable enough that the Church, as Christ's body, is God's 'fullness', but how can it be said that God *is filled* 'all in all'?

Maximus' answer is divided into two parts. The first is an exercise in apophatic theology in which he excludes God from all definition, perception, or participation by created beings. But then kataphatically speaking, that is, 'according to the providential procession, being participated in by many, he is also filled by them'. Every creature therefore, according to its *logos* in God, 'is said to be a member (μέλος) of God and to have a place in God'. At first glance it appears that Maximus is here speaking primarily of a cosmic rather than an ecclesial reality. But in what follows it becomes clear that the fulfilment of this participated cosmic reality occurs only in, or *as*, the body of Christ. Christ is the concrete meeting point at which the fullness of God and the totality of the

new creation co-penetrate, each filling and being filled by the other. For if, as he says, the creature moves in harmony with its *logos*, it will come to be 'in God, filling its own place and achieving its proper dignity as a useful member of the body of Christ'. The only alternative is non-being, or at best, being 'no-where'. To borrow Perl's apt phrase, '[t]he world *is* only as the body of Christ'. [131]

[131]Perl, 'Methexis', 305.

In these passages we have witnessed a close correspondence in the spiritual topographies of the individual soul, the cosmos, and the Church. Maximus knows of no opposition between the individual, communal, and cosmic. As Ephraim the Syrian has it, 'He who celebrates alone in the heart of the wilderness | He is a great assembly.' [132]

[132]Quoted by André Louf, *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 97.

The soul as microcosm *is* the Church, and the Church—as the *Lebensraum* of divine theophany, the fullness of Christ, the new creation—*is* the cosmos, or in Origen's words,

κόσμο   του κόσμου. [133]

[133]Or. *Joh*. 6.301.9 (SC 157. 360); Or. *Joh*. 6.304.42-3 (SC 157. 364): 'Let the Church, therefore, be said to be the cosmos when it is enlightened by the Saviour.' With Origen early Christianity apparently embraced the theology of Second-Temple Jewish sources—especially Philo—in which the Temple was likened to the cosmos and the Temple service seen to ensure continuing cosmic stability. See further C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-biblical Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 6-9, 108-41.

Yet while neither soul, cosmos, nor Church **end p.194** displaces the other, the Church occupies a kind of centre since it is the place where the new life of the individual soul begins and where the life of the cosmos reaches its goal. It is 'in the Church of God' that Christ the Word of the Father 'is proclaimed according to the pious faith, exalted by the life made virtuous through keeping the commandments, and manifested among the nations…'. Rightly then is the holy Church called a 'lampstand' (Zech. 4: 2), for through its preaching the word of God enlightens the whole 'house' or cosmos with the brilliant light of truth. [134]

[134]*Q.Thal*. 63.52-4 (CCSG 22. 147); 63.76-9 (CCSG 22. 149).

The divine plan that each person—bearing in himself the extremities of the cosmos—attain his proper place 'in God' is in fact fulfilled by participation in the body of Christ, so that it can be said both collectively and individually that 'in us the fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα) of the Godhead dwells bodily by grace', just as 'in Christ the Word of the Father all the fullness (ὅλον τὸ πλήρωμα) of the Godhead dwells bodily by essence'. [135]

[135]*Th.Oec*. 2.21 (PG 90. 1133d). Cf. Col. 2: 9.

Such correspondence and bodily (σωματικῶ   ) indwelling of the divine 'fullness' do not amount to the elimination of personal distinctions or the conflagration of all bodily particularity with the hypostasis of God the incarnate Word. Maximus insists on as much when in another striking passage from the *Chapters on Theology* he comments on the phrase, 'We [you] are the body of Christ and members of it each in particular' (1 Cor. 12: 27). [136]

[136]*Th.Oec*. 2.84 (PG 90. 1164bc).

The thrust of the passage can be more fully appreciated when it is examined in the light of the paragraph preceding it, [137]

[137]*Th.Oec*. 2.83 (PG 90. 1164b).

with which it forms a precise structural and thematic parallel. There the scriptural text up for consideration is St Paul's similarly outstanding claim, 'we have the mind (νου̃ν) of Christ' (1 Cor. 2: 16). According to Maximus, the saints receive this mind not by a negation (οὐ κατὰ στέρησιν) of our own intellective faculty, nor as a supplementary mind to ours, nor by its essential and hypostatic transferral into our mind, but by its illuminating the faculty of our mind through its own inherent quality and by its bringing (φέρων) our mind to the same activity.

The saints thereby are said to possess Christ's mind not by the elimination of their own mind or intellective faculty but by **end p.195** the harmonious activity of Christ's mind and theirs brought about by an illuminating qualification of the activity of their mind by his.

In a similar way, participation in Christ's body by a multiplicity of bodies does not threaten the integrity and unity of his body, nor does it entail the elimination of the plurality of the various members' bodies. Rather it implies the purging from individual bodies of the divisive character they have accrued through sin:

We are said to be the body of Christ…not by a negation (οὐ κατὰ στέρησιν) of our own bodies in our becoming his body, nor again by his hypostatic transferral into us—or by his being sundered limb from limb, but—in the likeness of our Lord's flesh—by the repudiation from oneself of sin's corruption. [138]

[138] *Th.Oec*. 2.84 (PG 90. 1164bc).

The same idea is expressed more subtly in the so-called 'nourishment texts' [139]

[139] Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life,* 80.

which often contain strongly eucharistic and ecclesiological undercurrents. [140]

[140] *Th.Oec*. 1.100 (PG 90. 1124cd); 2.56 (PG 90. 1149ab); 2.66 (PG 90. 1153b); 2.88 (PG 90. 1165d-1168b); *Or.dom*. 128-34 (CCSG 23. 34); 560-71 (CCSG 23. 59-60); *Q.Thal*. 36.1-47 (CCSG 7. 243-5); *Amb.Io*. 48 (PG 91. 1361a-1365c).

In them Maximus basically shows how the divine Word adapts himself to become edible and thus participatable in a manner commensurate with the multi-dimensional levels of common human existence and individual spiritual capacity. In this way, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer perceived in another context, 'the body of Jesus Christ takes up space on earth'. [141]

[141] 'Der Leib Jesu Christi nimmt Raum ein auf Erden.' Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt (eds.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Nachfolge* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1994), 241.

Commenting on Gregory Nazianzen's paschal homily in which various bodily parts and organs of the paschal lamb are spoken of as being 'consumed and distributed for spiritual digestion', [142]

[142] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 45.16 (PG 36. 645a).

Maximus explains that by such eating the Lord 'transforms into himself those who participate by the Spirit, initiating and repositioning each of them according to their state of bodily harmony into the place (τόπον) of the component which is spiritually consumed by that person…'. [143]

[143] *Amb.Io*. 48 (PG 91. 1365bc).

Thus spiritual eating—whether ethical, contemplative, or eucharistic—is actually a means of total, yet proportionate self-assimilation to a place in the body of the Word, a notion equally familiar to the mysticism of **end p.196** Origen or Gregory of Nyssa, or to the eucharistic ecclesiology of Cyril of Alexandria.

So far in our exposition of the Church's spiritual topography we have postponed closer analysis of the *Mystagogia*, but in turning to it now shall attempt to demonstrate

how it is only through the Church, in so far as it is the place of divine 'fullness', and specifically through its liturgy—'the sacred arrangement of the divine symbols' [144]

[144]*Myst*. 24 (Sotiropoulos 234.12).

—that God ultimately becomes 'all in all'. For while in his economic dispensation God is equally present to soul or cosmos, it is in the concrete, corporeal actions of the Church's eucharistic synaxis that the grace of the Holy Spirit is present 'most distinctively' (ἰδιοτρόπως δὲ μάλιστα) to 'transmute, transform and transfigure' each one. [145]

[145]*Myst*. 24 (Sotiropoulos 222.12-13).

LITURGICAL METAPHYSICS AND RITUAL ACTION[146]

Having devoted a whole section to an analysis of Maximus' ecclesiocentric use of the spatial term *topos*, we may now justifiably cite as instructive Robert Taft's remarks on the sense of space as characterized in the Byzantine liturgical tradition in general and in Justinian's great basilica, the Hagia Sophia, in particular. 'What was most new about this building, far more so than its startling architecture, was the *vision* created by its marvelous interior….' [147]

[147]Robert F. Taft, 'The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34-5 (1980-1), 47.

Taft describes it as a vision of 'awesome splendour', one which 'led observers of every epoch to exclaim with remarkable consistency that here, indeed, was heaven on earth, the heavenly sanctuary, a second firmament, image of the cosmos, throne of the very glory of God'. [148]

[148]Ibid., 48.

He adds the important observation that it was 'the space itself, not its decoration' which created this impression. [149]

[149]Ibid.

Perhaps on account of his almost certain participation in the synaxis of the capital's cathedral, and therefore his first-hand experience of this same dramatic sense of space, it may be said that **end p.197** Maximus, in a way not dissimilar to Dionysius, [150]

[150]Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and Introduction to their Influence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116-17.

generally pays greater attention in his *Mystagogia* to the symbolic value of ritual action and movement rather than to the significance of particular sacramental objects. [151]

[151]The church building itself—as symbol of the cosmos, the whole human being (mind, soul, body), and the soul considered in itself—is perhaps the only exception. Otherwise the word *symbolon* in the *Mystagogia* is reserved for ritual *actions* such as the entrance, the chants, the readings, the closing of the doors, the kiss of peace, the confession of 'the symbol of faith', and the invocation of God the Father in the Lord's prayer. Precisely what we mean by the terms 'symbol', 'symbolic', and 'symbolism' and what Maximus intends by using the terms 'type and image' is summed up by R. Bornert: 'The image is in a certain manner that which it represents and, in turn, the thing signified exists in its sensible representation. This close relationship between the image and the reality it signifies forms the basis of St Maximus' sacramental and liturgical symbolism.' R. Bornert, 'Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XIe siècle', *Archives de l'Orient chrétien* 9 (1966), 113-14, quoted by Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 405 n. 37.

For him the Church's liturgy constitutes a progressive series of unfolding symbolic, theandric activities through which the hidden, eschatological union of the cosmos in and with God is manifested and realized in historic time. His experiences in the Great Church

may also account for his uniqueness among Greek mystagogues in according particular symbolic prominence to the church's architectural topography in the traditional twofold division of the church building into two *topoi*—the nave (ναός), accessible to all the lay faithful, and the sanctuary (ἱερατεῖον), accessible exclusively to priests and deacons. This topography speaks for Maximus of the inherent unity and diversity of the Church, the human being, and the entire cosmos. While each remains a distinct space whose boundary is governed by the hierarchical orders and the kind of liturgical action performed in it, the church 'being by construction a single building…is one in its concrete reality (μία ἐστὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν) without being divided with its parts on account of their difference from one another'. [152]

[152] *Myst*. 2 (Sotiropoulos 156.11-13).

In going on to explain how it is that this fundamental unity of the church building as a single, particular reality (hypostasis) is not damaged by the difference admitted through its division into two distinct spaces, Maximus uses a term which we encountered in our analysis of *Ambiguum* 7 where he explains how the many *logoi* are in **end p.198** fact one *Logos* 'by means of *the reference* (τῇ ἀναφορᾷ) of all things to it, since it exists without confusion by virtue of itself'. [153]

[153] *Amb.Io*. 7 (PG 91. 1077c).

In our present context he writes:

by means of the reference [of the parts] to [the building's] unity, the church releases these parts from their difference in name, reveals both to be identical with one another, and shows one to be to the other reciprocally (κατ᾽ ἐπαλλαγὴν) what each one is in itself: the nave, being sanctified as a priestly offering by the reference of the sacred rite to its destination (τῇ πρὸς τὸ πέρας ἀναφορᾷ τῆς μυσταγωγίας ἱερουργούμενον), is the sanctuary in potential, and in turn the sanctuary, since it has the nave as the starting point (ἀρχὴν) of its own sacred rite, is the nave in actuality. The church remains one and the same through both. [154]

[154] *Myst*. 2 (Sotiropoulos 156.13-19).

It is worth underscoring that Maximus is here speaking about a decidedly concrete, material object: the church as a building, and the actual rite of the synaxis which begins in the nave and proceeds to the sanctuary. The sanctuary, towards which the focus of the people in the nave is drawn and to which they finally come for communion, constitutes the final destination (τὸ πέρας) of the whole rite. From the beginning of the service then, the nave is already the sanctuary in potential, since the progressive movement of 'the sacred rite' (μυσταγωγία) orients its lay occupants towards it. [155]

[155] In *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 162-9, Thomas F. Mathews argues on the basis of textual and archaeological evidence that in non-Syrian churches of this time there existed no visual barrier (such as a curtain or iconostasis screen) between the nave and sanctuary. The cloth-covered altar was apparently clearly visible to the lay participants throughout the rite.

But this rite which properly culminates in the sanctuary actually begins in the nave as the first processional entrance of the people with the bishop. [156]

[156] *Myst*. 8-9 (Sotiropoulos 192.1-194.21).

Maximus' meditations on the twofold division of the church space are therefore bound to his observation of the way in which those different parts (μέρη) function in the ritual actions and movement of the liturgy. In no way does his insistence on their fundamental unity imply that the division is arbitrary or dispensible. The two spaces in the church building are distinct elements in a single reality whose primary, final, subjective singularity is brought about by the ordered, reciprocal penetration **end p.199** of its parts and their ritually determined orientation to their final state. Suggested in Maximus' use of the Aristotelian term 'reference' is, in contrast to Dionysius, an eschatological perspective that views the different parts in terms of what they will become (and thus *are*) as a single subject.[157]

[157]According to Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary,* 122, Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* contains 'not a hint of such eschatological typology or correlation of the events of the liturgy with the future glory of heaven'.

It cannot be accidental that he finds this term especially applicable to a relationship centred upon and realized in association with the unfolding movement of the eucharistic synaxis, whose central prayer addressed to God the Father is also called the anaphora. It is chiefly by means of their ritually achieved 'reference' or upward orientation to the final unity realized through communion in the earthly-heavenly sanctuary that the distinct parts of the church building—and, by extension, the members who occupy those parts—compose a single hypostatic reality.[158]

[158]Maximus makes use of a parallel metaphor to depict the same reality. Scripture speaks of Christ as 'the head of the corner' (Psalm 117: 22). Thus 'corner', the union of two walls, is for Maximus the Church which joins Gentiles and Jews in one faith. It is a union of universals and particulars, of intelligible and sensible, of heaven and earth, of the Logos and creation. See *Q.Thal*. 48.178-93 (CCSG 7. 341); 53.6-16 (CCSG 7. 431).

What we are emphasizing is that the metaphysical 'reference' of the parts to their whole is seen to be ritually achieved. The ordered divisions of the church building and the two-tiered structure of the liturgy are presented by Maximus, at least in this instance, as the means of ritually effecting—by disclosing—the unity of 'another sort of church not made with human hands', that is, the cosmos—likewise undivided in its division into intelligible and sensible reality. The 'reference' of the distinct parts to their indivisibly single, concrete, hypostatic reality—whether church building or cosmos—allows them to be seen at the same time as identical both to that single reality and to each other (ταυτὸν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ ἀλλήλοι). The whole wholly fills all its parts, and in and through each distinct part there is made manifest entire both the other part and the whole. Taking this section further not simply as a commentary on church architecture but as a demonstrative parable of 'the holy Church of God' as image of the cosmos, the Church's fundamental unity can be seen to be an eschatological reality whose potential **end p.200** subjectivity is realized in subsistent actuality via the inductive movement enacted in 'the sacred rite'.

Maximus describes the same ritually achieved reality with even greater metaphysical precision in the first chapter of the *Mystagogia* when, in defining how the Church 'bears the type and image of God', he states that it shares 'by imitation and type' God's activity by which he draws diverse beings together into unconfused union with one another in himself. Here again we find the term 'reference' playing a pivotal role. Its meaning is further elucidated by its being paired with συνέλευσι (gathering) and ἕνωσι

(union), and by its association with the term σχέσι (relation). But before we examine the particulars, let us first view the chapter as a whole.
In the first half Maximus outlines the entire economy of God's activity in creation as it can be summarized by the biblical and Neoplatonic formula that knows God to be 'all in all' (πάντὰ ἐν πᾶσιν). Having created all intelligible and sensible beings
God contains, gathers, circumscribes, and providentially binds them to himself and to one another. Maintaining around himself as cause, beginning and end all beings that are naturally set apart from one another, he makes them converge with one another by virtue of the singular power of their relation to him as beginning (κατὰ μίαν τὴν πρὸ αὐτὸν ὡ ἀρχὴν σχέσεω δύναμιν ἀλλήλοι συννενευκότα ποιε͂ι). [159]

[159] *Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 150.6-11).

It is this indissoluble 'relation' (σχέσι) that proves to be the critical factor in the simultaneous unity and identity of diverse beings with one another and with God. So much so that it is said by Maximus to
render impotent and obscure (καταργοῦσαν τε καὶ ἐπικαλύπτουσαν) all the particular relations (ἰδικὰ σχέσει) considered according to each being's nature, not by dissolving or destroying them or making them cease to exist, but by overcoming and transcendently revealing them in the way of a whole with its parts.… For just as parts naturally come from the whole, so also do effects properly proceed and come to be recognized from their cause and suspend their particularity in a state of rest at which point, having acquired their reference to the cause (ἡνίκα τῆ πρὸ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀναφορᾶ περιληφθέντα), they are wholly qualified in accordance with the singular power of their relation (σχέσεω) to the cause. [160]

[160] *Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 150.16-152.2).**end p.201**

In the same way, as an image reflecting its archetype, the Church effects with human beings the very same activity God performs in creation. But the two activities, ecclesial and divine, are not simply parallels. They are the same, in that their effects are indistinguishable. Mirroring the vast diversity in creation, almost infinite is the multiplicity of men, women, and children differing from one another by race and class, nationality and language, custom and age, opinions and skills, manners and habits, pursuits and studies, reputation, fortune, characteristics, and connections. Yet distinct and different as they are, 'those who are brought into being in the Church (τῶν ἐι αὐτὴν γιγνομένων) are by her reborn and recreated in the Spirit'. [161]

[161] *Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 152. 16-17).

The language here is at once metaphysical and baptismal, since holy baptism is the primary means by which the Church as active subject brings about in these disparate people an utterly new mode of existence. It is in connection with this baptismal, ritual

activity of the Church that we find Maximus once again pairing the terms 'relation' and 'reference':

The Church confers on and gives to all equally a single divine form and designation, namely, both to belong to Christ and to be named from him. And she confers on and gives to all in proportion to faith a simple, whole, and indivisible relation (σχέσιν) which, on account of the universal reference and gathering of all things into her, hides from recognition the existence of the many and innumerable differences among them. [162]

[162] *Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 152.17-21).

'Relation' therefore, as the beneficial result of the universal, eschatological 'reference and gathering' of all creation into the Church, and as a condition commensurate to faith, is brought about ritually through baptism. On account of it 'no one at all is separated from what is common to him'. Rather 'all converge and join with one another by virtue of the one, simple, indivisible grace and power of faith, 'for all', he says, 'had but one heart and soul' (Acts 4: 32), since to be and to appear as one body of different members is actually worthy of Christ himself, our true head'. This according to Maximus is none other than the fulfilment of the Apostle's words in the great baptismal text of Galatians 3: 28, and of Colossians 3: 11 in which Christ himself is said to be 'all and in all' (πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν). To be one is to be the Church, and to be the Church is to be Christ. Separation from this reality amounts to dissolution into relative non-being. The soul's activity as a member of the body, the **end p.202** Church's activity as the body of Christ, Christ's activity as Saviour and head, and God the Trinity's activity as creator are, at the level of effect, one and the same. Maximus predicates to God an activity among created beings of identical character and employing identical means to that of the Church: 'he softens the differences surrounding them and creates an identity by their reference and union to himself (τῇ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν…ἀναφορᾷ τε καὶ ἑνώσει)'. [163]

[163] *Myst*. 1 (Sotiropoulos 154.19-20).

The Church images God because the union of the faithful with God it effects *is* the union of the whole universe with God achieved by him without confusion.

To conclude this chapter, we may summarize our findings against the broader background of patristic ecclesiology. From very early on in the development of Christian thought there was expressed the intuition that the Church is somehow the very pinnacle of all creation, indeed, the central purpose of the whole divine economy of creation and redemption. According to the Shepherd of Hermas the Church was created first before all things: it is for her sake that the entire world was created. [164]

[164] Herm. *Vis*. 2.4.1 (SC 53. 96).

Earlier still in Second Clement the Church is said to precede all creation: she is 'spiritual' and 'from above' (ἄνωθεν). But in the last days she was made manifest in Christ's flesh, itself a 'type' (ἀντίτυπο) of the spiritual. [165]

[165] *2 Clem*. 14 (J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (eds. and trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1898), 49-50).

For Origen too, the body of Jesus which was crucified and raised from the dead is considered to be a type of the Church, not the other way around. [166]

[166] Or. *Joh*. 10.228 (SC 157. 520).

In short the Church is, as it were, the final, ultimate created and divine reality to which the cosmos and the flesh of Christ testify. The Church is

…the pure height,
Clear, lofty and fair;
Scripture named it Eden,
The summit of all blessings. [167]

[167] Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* 5.5, in Sebastian Brock (trans.), *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, 2nd edn. (Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 4, Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1983), 23.

Alongside these convictions goes the understanding of the mutual interpenetration of God the Logos and his own incarnate **end p.203** body, and the identification by grace of this body with the Church and, ultimately, the cosmos. In Origen's words, 'just as a soul animates and moves the body which is unable to live or move by itself, so the Word, moving and activating the whole body as required, moves the Church and each of her members which do nothing apart from the Word'. [168]

[168] Or. *Cels*. 6.48.17-21 (SC 147. 300).

We have found Maximus at once faithful to these traditions and yet developing them by anchoring them firmly in the Church's actual hierarchical and liturgical structures. For him the Church is a kind of liturgical synthesis of all creation as it is summed up in the three laws of nature (cosmos), law (Scripture), and the Spirit (Christ). In these three, he says, 'is encompassed the entire orderly arrangement (διάκοσμο) of the Church'. [169]

[169] *Q.Thal*. 64.809-10 (CCSG 22. 239).

Through its thoroughly corporeal hierarchical, doctrinal, and liturgical constitution, it brings into being the new creation prefigured in the old. Or as Louth has remarked, 'The body of Christ confers a redeemed significance on the cosmos and marks out a sacred space in which this redemption is celebrated and effected.' [170]

[170] Louth, 'The Body in Western Catholic Christianity', 121.

The ritually achieved ecclesial union Maximus envisages between God and the soul/cosmos is nothing short of that future nuptial mystery heralded by Moses (Gen. 2: 23), marvelled at by St Paul (Eph. 5: 29-32), and unveiled in all its splendour in St John's Apocalypse (Rev. 21: 1-4). Drawing upon language familiar to the tradition of contemplative exegesis of Solomon's Song of Songs, Maximus calls it 'the blessed and most holy intercourse by virtue of which there is accomplished that awesome mystery of the union surpassing mind and reason, a mystery through which God becomes one flesh and one spirit with the Church, and thus with the soul, and the soul with God'. [171]

[171] *Myst*. 5 (Sotiropoulos 176.15-19).

Indeed, in the ritual expulsion of the catechumens and the closing of the doors in the liturgy is anticipated the future passing away of the material world, the complete abolition of deceitful activity in the senses, and the entry of the worthy into the intelligible world, that is, into 'the bridal chamber of Christ'. [172]

[172] *Myst*. 15 (Sotiropoulos 204.7). Cf. *Th.Oec*. 1.16 (PG 90. 1089a).

No wonder then that near the end of the *Mystagogia* Maximus follows both 'the blessed old man' and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 10: 25) in exhorting his readers not to abandon **end p.204** the holy assembly at which the mysteries of their salvation are performatively demonstrated. There (ἐνταῦθα), in an exclusively defined space, through corporeal, sensible symbols—the ritual actions of the eucharistic liturgy culminating in holy communion—are exhibited proleptically 'the archetypal mysteries': gifts of the Holy Spirit in which the baptized in this life already participate 'through

grace, by faith' (διὰ τῆς ἐν πίστει χάριτος) and in which they shall in the age to come participate 'in actual, concrete fact' (ἐνυποστάτως αὐτῷ τῷ πράγματι), that is, when they pass from 'grace by faith' to 'grace by sight'. [173]

[173] *Myst*. 24 (Sotiropoulos, 224.24-226.4).end p.205

5 Corporeality and the Christian

Frail creatures are we all! To be the best,
Is but the fewest faults to have:-
Look thou then to thyself, and leave the rest
To God, thy conscience, and the grave. [1]

[1]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Humility the Mother of Charity*, in Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 486.

'What is a monk?…A monk is toil. The monk toils at all he does. That is what a monk is.' [2]

[2]Quoted in Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (CS 59, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 93.

This saying from Abba John the Dwarf well encapsulates Maximus' vision of the practical aspect of monastic discipleship in which the Christian embodies participation with the one who 'had to suffer'. Here in this final chapter all the relevant findings of our previous enquiries come together at the level of the concrete personal spiritual quest for perfection. Here we shall be able to offer the most explicit, clearly defined answer to our original question: what happens to the body when it is deified?

From a purely biological perspective, individual human existence begins at conception and ends at death. Birth and death universally constitute the inescapable parameters within which the human struggle for existence is contrived. Like his spiritual predecessors, Maximus is a realist when it comes to recognizing death as the inevitable terminus of our present bodily existence, and when he seeks to live out the ancient philosophical ideal of making this life a preparation for death. [3]

[3]Plato *Phaedo* 81a; Greg.Naz. *Or*. 27.7 (SC 250. 86-8); Maximus, *Or.dom*. 599-600 (CCSG 23. 61).

That means, among other things, not simply thinking about one's own mortality, but actually putting into present practice the impending separation between **end p.206** soul and body 'by cutting the soul off from worrying about bodily concerns' even before death comes. [4]

[4]*Or.dom*. 601-2 (CCSG 23. 61).

But the ancient Platonic ideal of making this life a preparation for death is deepened and given even broader corporeal contours in the theology of the Christian Fathers. Maximus acknowledges with St Paul that through the waters of holy baptism the Christian has in fact already entered into the path that leads through the shadow of death to the life beyond. In this chapter we shall see how baptism forms the connecting point by which the universally significant events of Christ's own birth, baptism, death, and resurrection in the flesh are applied at the level of the individual and particular. And if the sacrament of baptism plunges the baptized into Christ's death, then it also establishes and pre-empts in them at a corporeal, historical level the pattern of Christ's resurrection. As von Balthasar has perceived, it is only by virtue of Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension that 'the

material cosmos can follow the soul into the kingdom of heaven when it is translated into the world of God…'.[5]

[5]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A. V. Littledale (London: SPCK, 1961), 210.

Ultimately baptism is made complete at the final day when our own bodies are raised from the dead.

We shall see too how Maximus views the purification wrought in baptism as encompassing both the moral and spiritual spheres. At one point he is asked to comment on the difference between being born 'of water and the Spirit' (John 3: 5) and being baptized 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matt. 3: 11; Luke 3: 16). When these two passages from the Gospels are placed alongside one another, he discerns a parallelism indicating the dual level, corporeal and spiritual, at which the Spirit is operative:

The Holy Spirit is active in each. As water he purifies the defilement of the flesh, and as the Spirit he cleanses the stain of the soul. As the Holy Spirit he establishes as preliminary the way of the virtues, and as fire he makes a person God by grace, radiating on him the divine characteristics of virtue.[6]

[6]*QD* 4 (CCSG 10. 4-5).

In this connection we shall witness Maximus' understanding that the faith given in baptism is a potential which must willingly be brought to actuality through the exercise of virtue. This activated faith is love, by which the believer renewed in the image of God comes perfectly to be likened to him. Only through love does the **end p.207** Christian possess *in toto* the concrete reality towards which faith impels him. Maximus' way of conceiving the relationship between faith and love discerns the intrinsically social, ecclesial character of divine love, leading us perhaps to be able to answer the question raised by Georges Bernanos' country priest when, speaking approvingly of 'old monks, wise, shrewd, unerring in judgement, and yet aglow with passionate insight, so very tender in their humanity', he immediately asks, 'What miracle enables these semi-lunatics, these prisoners of their own dreams, these sleepwalkers, apparently to enter more deeply each day into the pain of others?'[7]

[7]Georges Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (London: Boriswood, 1937), 115.

Drawing on a pair of sayings from the wisdom tradition of Ecclesiasticus (6: 14-15), the Confessor shows in a series of sentences what it takes to make a faithful friend (φίλο πίστο).[8]

[8]*Car*. 4.93-9 (PG 90. 1072a-1072d).

All the effort expended in acquiring the virtues that renders a monk unperturbed in the midst of demonic attack and infinite distraction is intended to lead to his faithful participation in the sufferings of another. Existential, suffering love for the godforsaken is the summit of all the corporeal works of asceticism and the touchstone by which true spiritual progress is tested and proved.[9]

[9]Cf. *LA* 36.698-700 (CCSG 40. 81).

Consequently deification is manifested bodily most poignantly under the form of suffering love. And only in the Church, among Christ's disciples, is this love to be found, 'for only they have the true love, the teacher of love.…Therefore the one who possesses love possesses God himself, since "God is love" (1 John 4: 8).'[10]

[10]*Car*. 4.100 (PG 90. 1073a).

These then in brief are the themes of our final chapter. Let us now examine them in closer detail.

BODILY BIRTH, SEX, AND DEATH

It is almost inevitable that in attempting to describe the place of the body in Maximus' theological vision we must eventually treat three topics which heavily occupy contemporary body theologies, namely birth, sex, and death. At the heart of Maximus' fivefold division of created being lies the division between male and female, and not surprisingly it is here that Christ's renovative work of reconciling the various divisions in the universe must start. The **end p.208** recapitulation of the universe in Christ begins by his overcoming the fundamental division between the sexes, 'for in Christ Jesus', as we have found Maximus repeatedly pointing out, 'there is no male and female' (Gal. 3: 28). It forms the essential first stage of unification from which Christ ascends through the intermediate steps of reconciliation in proper order and rank, ending at last with the division between created and uncreated. [11]

[11]*Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1305bc, 1309a).

But why is it so, we may ask? Why is this particular bifurcation found to be so divisive? How did it arise? Moreover, how is it healed in the particular history of the incarnate Word and his incarnate life in the virtuous Christian, and what implications does that healing bear for the way in which redeemed women and men are to relate to one another? What is its relation to marriage and virginity, to the 'natural' cycle of bodily birth, ageing, suffering, and death, and so to the deification of bodily beings whose concrete existence in this world is necessarily characterized by such 'marks of corruption'? What we offer here is hardly the 'detailed study' of this theme in Maximus called for by Verna Harrison over a decade ago, [12]

[12]Verna E. F. Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', *JTS NS* 41 (1990), 469 n. 93.

but it will hopefully open up avenues for further reflection, research, and action.

We may begin attending to these questions by returning to examine more closely Maximus' understanding of the causes of humanity's fall and of the character and function of its gendered condition. It should be emphasized that the problem presented by sexual differentiation in bodily human nature, a differentiation created by God, can only properly be understood within a context in which sexual reproduction is seen to carry a double significance: it provisionally ensures the overall continuation of the whole human species, but also perpetuates the cycle of individual human mortality. Thus sexual reproduction, whose condition is sexual differentiation, is an aspect of God's providential but at the same time punitive provision on account of human sin. According to Maximus, 'it is in bodily birth', a *pathos* issuing from a deviant carnal pleasure, 'that the power of our condemnation resides'. [13]

[13]*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348c).

Scholars have recognized Maximus' reception and development of a long tradition most characteristically expressed in Gregory of **end p.209** Nyssa's speculations regarding the essentially asexual character of the primal human being(s) made in the image of God. [14]

[14]Secondary commentators include von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 202 (ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 204); Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 373-6; Larchet, 'Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 27. On this aspect of Gregory's anthropology see Greg.Nyss. *Opif*. 16-18 (PG 44. 177d-196b); Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 48-71; Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', 465-71.

For Gregory, God adds gender to human beings in preview of their impending fall toward the material world. The bishop of Nyssa's readiness—on the basis of the fact that the sacred text only mentions Adam and Eve's sexual intercourse *after* their expulsion from Paradise (Gen. 4: 1)—to link genital procreation with the curse of death resulting from sin, may at first blush appear to represent an almost Encratist view of marriage and sex. Only when we recognize it as the fruit of considered reflection on what is regarded as clear scriptural warrant for asserting the primacy of both virginity and the primal couple's eschatologically oriented, angelic mode of existence can we appreciate its subtlety and apologetic value. [15]

[15]Cf. Luke 20: 35-6; 1 Cor. 7: 1-40. See the insightful article by Ton H. C. van Eijk in which he traces precisely these themes in the Greek philosophical and patristic traditions: 'Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality', in Fontaine and Kannengiesser, *Epektasis*, 209-35, esp. 230-4.

Marriage is for Gregory, as van Eijk and others have rightly argued, an 'ambiguous' reality whose positive value and purpose is contingent upon its proper ordering and use. [16]

[16]'Marriage and Virginity', 231.

While the soul, the ontological seat of human nature, is essentially asexual, it is according to Rowan Williams's astute analysis 'always implicated in contingent matter, and even its final liberation for pilgrimage into God depends…upon the deployment and integration of bodiliness and animality. That is to say, the ungenderedness of the soul is never the actual state of a real subject.' [17]

[17]Rowan Williams, 'Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', in Lionel R. Wickham and Caroline P. Bammel (eds.), *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1993), 244.

Maximus is clearly following in Gregory's footsteps when he views marital procreation, a function that depends on sexual differentiation for its existence, as a provisional gift added to

end p.210 human nature on account of Adam's sin. In one crucial and unambiguous phrase, Adam's transgression itself is identified as the instrumental cause by which marriage is introduced: Ἡδὲ παράβασι τη ἐντολη τὸν γάμον εἰσήγαγεν διὰ τὸ ἀνομησαι τὸν Ἀδάμ, τουτέστιν ἀθετησαι τὸν ἐκ θεου δοθέντα αὐτῷ νόμον. [18]

[18]*QD* i. 3.4-6 (CCSG 10. 138).

Yet in citing this we would want immediately to add the observation that sexual differentiation, like the four other divisions detailed in *Ambiguum* 41 between created and uncreated, sensible and intelligible, earth and heaven, the inhabited world and paradise, only becomes a problem when, through ignorance of their fundamental connectedness, human beings fail to unite each aspect of these respective divisions within their own lives. This ignorance can properly be said to amount to a genuine 'failure' since, by virtue of its *genesis* from God, human nature possesses a natural capacity to unite the disparate parts of each division in itself. [19]

[19]*Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1308c, 1309d).

As the Confessor asserts in connection with the first division between created and uncreated, 'although God has created the radiant orderly arrangement of all beings in his goodness, what and how it came to be is not immediately apparent therein. [Thus] the saints call this division, which divides creation and God, ignorance.' [20]

[20]*Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1304d-1305a).

Conversely, the reunion or reconciliation of the divided entities by no means involves the elimination of their distinct characteristics, but, being a matter of τελεία γνῶσι ,[21]

[21]*Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1305d).

involves the recognition of an overarching divine *logos* in whose universality even the most particular extremities are united without being reduced to a solitary metaphysical unit by their specific differences collapsing in confusion or dissolving into non-existence. Thus I think it is fair to say that it is unlikely Maximus is referring specifically to sexual genitalia when he speaks here and there in somewhat circumlocutary fashion of τὰ γνωρίσματα of Adam, explained further as 'the characteristic features of those subject to generation and corruption',[22]

[22]*Q.Thal*. 61.60 (CCSG 22. 87); 61.150-5 (CCSG 22. 93).

even though certain occurrences may suggest a connection.[23]

[23]See *Or.dom*. 400-2 (CCSG 23. 50); *Amb.Io*.41 (PG 91. 1312a). Maximus no doubt would have been aware of Gregory Nazianzen's reference (Greg.Naz. *Or*. 7.23.22 (SC 405. 240)) to all the divisions listed in Galatians 3: 28 as τὰ τη σαρκ ο γνωρίσματα.

Whatever these **end p.211** distinguishing marks are in concrete, corporeal fact, they apparently function as the external indicators of the punishment (τὸ ἐπιτίμιον) residing in human flesh by which human beings receive their life through birth from seed and blood (like the plants and animals), keep their life through pain and toil, and eventually lose their life through corruption and death.[24]

[24]*Q.Thal*. 61.148-64 (CCSG 22. 93-5).

If they are not the genitalia themselves, then they are the characteristic marks of animal life generated by genital reproduction: birth, ageing, suffering, and death. These things will indeed be done away with.

We have seen that in Maximus' mind sexual differentiation, which 'in no way depends on the primordial reason behind the divine purpose concerning human generation,'[25]

[25]*Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1305c).

is provisionally linked to Adam's fall. Next we must ask how. Maximus implicitly locates the answer within his discussions on the complex relationship between pleasure (ἡδονή) and pain (ὀδύνη). While Christoph Schönborn is surely right to highlight the remarkable 'freshness' and 'cultural plausibility' Maximus' analysis retains for our own contemporary situation,[26] the discussions themselves most often arise in connection with and, as Larchet notes, are 'for the most part justified by the special conception of the modalities of the saving economy of Christ'.[27] In other words, what Maximus has to say on pleasure and pain does not arise out of any kind of personal psychological angst any more than his position on sexual differentiation and marriage arises out of any kind of personal sexual phobia. Rather both arise out of an attempt to connect christology concretely to the Adamic state within a teleological view of perfection. The *locus classicus* for this topic is found at the beginning of *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61:

When God created human nature, he did not create along with it sensual pleasure or sensual pain, but built into it a certain spiritual capacity for pleasure, according to which it would be able ineffably to enjoy him. But at the very moment he came into being, the first man surrendered this capacity—I mean the natural desire of the intellect for God—to the senses, and so according to this initial movement toward sensible objects by means of sense perception he experienced the kind of pleasure which is activated **end p.212** in a

manner contrary to nature. To this pleasure the one who tends to our salvation providentially attached pain as a sort of assisting punitive power. By virtue of this power the law of death was wisely implanted in bodily nature, in this way curbing the unnatural desire of the mind's madness—the desire which is moved towards sensible objects. [28]

[28]*Q.Thal*. 61.8-21 (CCSG 22. 85).

The law of death, operative in all human nature, is here seen to follow as the direct result of Adam's surrender to his sensual appetite. [29]

[29]Or as Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 377) summarizes, 'Man's fall was due to bodily desire and search for sensual lust. That is Maximus' basic conviction, and it is confirmed through his definition of self-love as love for the body, which he considers to be the root of all sins and passions and the primitive sin which caused the fall.'

But to this 'initial movement' away from God towards the experience of sensual pleasure, God has, in the interests of man's immediate correction and eventual restoration, attached pain, hardship, and suffering, upon which follows death (cf. Gen. 3: 16-19). Such pain tempers man's appetite for unnatural pleasure and limits its spread, [30]

[30]Larchet ('Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 35) notes that Maximus 'does not seem to ascribe an expansion to evil to the development of human nature [per se], but rather to the fact that men have, each one through choice and through his own sins, persevered in the way of evil opened by Adam'.

but remains powerless to negate it entirely. Fallen man henceforth 'gains his generative origin from corruption through pleasure unto corruption through death'. [31]

[31]*Q.Thal*. 61.46-9 (CCSG 22. 87).

In a poignant metaphor in which he exploits the ancient association of human mortality with a birth arising out of pleasure (Wisd. 7: 1-2), Maximus calls pleasure 'the mother of death', for the sexual desire that leads to intercourse and conception gives birth to a life subject to pain and suffering and bordered by corruption and death. [32]

[32]*Q.Thal*. 61.138-9 (CCSG 22. 93).

In fact 'the more human nature strives to perpetuate its existence through birth, the more it binds itself to the law of sin, since its passibility [33]

[33]That is, its tendency to sin.

continues to activate transgression'. [34]

[34]*Q.Thal*. 21.24-7 (CCSG 7. 127).

'By his fear of death man remains enslaved to pleasure.' [35]

[35]*Q.Thal*. 21.70-1 (CCSG 7. 131).

Human existence between the extremities of pleasure and pain involves its members therefore in a torturous dialectic:

For while wanting to flee from the painful sensation associated with pain we seek refuge in pleasure, endeavouring to appease the nature that is hard **end p.213** pressed by the torment of pain. And striving through pleasure to dull the disturbances of pain, we fully confirm its 'written charge against us' (Col. 2: 14) and are unable to have pleasure without pain and hardships. [36]

[36]*Q.Thal*. 61.92-100 (CCSG 22. 89-91).

Maximus has certainly put his finger on a universal existential affliction, something like that recognized in our own time by Bernanos when his priest asks: 'how is it we fail to realize that the mask of pleasure, stripped of all hypocrisy, is that of anguish?' [37]

[37] *Diary of a Country Priest*, 136.

What is more, there seems no hope of disillusionment from this lie. By its very fallen existence human nature is 'bound indissolubly in a treacherous bond'. [38]

[38]*Q.Thal*. 21.23-4 (CCSG 7. 127).

At the heart of this dialectic lies the disordered and thus 'deliberative' will (*gnome*) and the corrupted faculty of choice (*proairesis*) in each individual. 'Having a deliberative will that shrinks from pain out of cowardice, man, who is thoroughly dominated by the fear of death, even against his will, in an effort to prolong life, stays locked in slavery to pleasure.' [39]

[39] *Q.Thal*. 21.82-5 (CCSG 7. 131).

In a related passage cited earlier Maximus is prompted to comment on the well-known verse from Psalm 50, usually rendered in English: 'I was born in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive (ἐκίσσησε) me.' [40]

[40] *QD* i. 3.1-13 (CCSG 10. 138-9).

He first affirms that birth involving marriage and corruption was not part of God's original purpose (*skopos*). Marriage was introduced by Adam's transgression, that is, 'his disregard for the law given to him by God'. At this point the Confessor makes a strikingly original distinction based on the literal meaning of the rare verb κισσάω, a *hapax* in the LXX, in the sense used to describe the pleasurable pining of a pregnant woman for her child, and further suggested by the syntactic division of the verse into two clauses:

Consequently all those born from Adam are 'conceived in iniquity', thereby falling under the condemnation of the forefather. And the phrase 'and in sin did my mother conceive me' indicates that Eve—the first mother of us all—pined for sin (ἐκίσσησε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν), in that she desired sexual pleasure. This is why we also fall under the condemnation of our mother, and speak of being craved for (κισσᾶσθαι) in sin. [41]

[41] *QD* i. 3.7-13 (CCSG 10. 138-9).

By its association with the unnatural desire for carnal pleasure, genital procreation is seen by Maximus to be the result of a fall from **end p.214** a more superior form of reproduction common to created intelligible beings. [42]

[42] See *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1309a) where Maximus mentions 'another way, foreknown by God, for human beings to increase, if the first human being had kept the commandment and not cast himself down to an animal state by abusing his own proper powers'.

Yet having asked whether this does not imply that 'the joining of man to woman is always something sinful', Sherwood—rightly I believe—can supply a negative answer. [43]

[43] *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 67-70.

Marriage, since it has been instituted providentially by God, is not sinful. The law of nature that dictates the use of carnal pleasure as a necessary means of propagation is in itself 'blameless' (ἀναίτιον), [44]

[44] *Q.Thal*. 61.33 (CCSG 22. 87).

even though it is a law that amounts to the 'bestializing' [45]

[45] Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 68.

of human nature so that in this act man resembles the irrational plants and animals. For Maximus as for Gregory of Nyssa, sexual instinct is 'neutral' and 'acquires moral colouring only in relation to the goals and activity of mind'—and, we might add, in relation to the law and scope of nature. [46]

[46] Williams, 'Macrina's Deathbed Revisited', 235.

The trouble therefore is not with sexual intercourse itself, but with the fact that human existence is dependent upon a law that arose out of and perpetuates an unnatural desire for carnal pleasure, a desire whose ultimate root is 'self-love' (φιλαυτία). From as far back as Clement of Alexandria the tradition knew of self-love as 'the cause of all sins' (πάντων ἁμαρτημάτων αἰτία). [47]

[47]Clem. *Str*. 6.7.56 (SC 446. 174). Cf. *Car*. 3.57 (PG 90. 1033c).

Maximus defines it as 'the first sin, the first progeny of the devil and the mother of the passions'. [48]

[48]*Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 397c).

Even more specifically it is 'the passionate attachment to the body' (τὸ πρὸ τὸ σω-μα πάθο), [49]

[49]*Car*. 2.8 (PG 90. 985c).

or 'the irrational love for the body' (ἡ του- σώματο ἄλογο φιλία). [50]

[50]*Car*. 2.59 (PG 90. 1004b); also 3.8 (PG 90. 1020ab); 3.56-7 (PG 90. 1033bc).

Self-love therefore is not only the fundamental egoistic orientation of fallen man, but his bodily egoism, his state of being *curvatus in se*, whose form and focus is chiefly carnal. As Thunberg has demonstrated, self-love 'manifests itself *primarily* in an inner affection for bodily sensations and the sensible world…'. [51]

[51]*Microcosm and Mediator*, 244. For the whole of his outstanding analysis, see *Microcosm and Mediator*, 231-48. Also Irénée Hausherr, *Philautie. De la tendresse pour soi à la charité selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 137, Rome: Pontificale Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1952). One of the most important texts in Maximus on this theme is the lengthy prologue to the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 7. 17-43).end **p.215**

Human beings generated under this regime nevertheless do not share in Adam's guilt so much as in its consequences, namely passibility (susceptibility to unnatural passionate attachments), corruption, and death. [52]

[52]We may once again profitably cite Larchet ('Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 35-6) in this connection: 'If all men necessarily suffer the effects of Adam's sin, they sin themselves (and are consequently guilty) not because they have inherited Adam's personal sin in their nature, but because they imitate Adam…. Such [a] conception has nonetheless to be expressed with many precautions, because the idea that sin is transmitted only by imitation was one of the first and main arguments of [the] Pelagians.'

Notice that these are effects specifically brought about and experienced at a bodily level. They are what Maximus at one point calls the 'operations' of the evil powers 'embedded in the provisional law of nature'. [53]

[53]*Q.Thal*. 21.45 (CCSG 7. 129).

In studying this dialectic between pleasure and pain we are led to analyse more precisely the character of bodily birth, for in Maximus' mind the latter forms a kind of connecting point by which all human beings become united to Adam and heirs of the consequences of his fall. In this context 'bodily birth' entails much more than the simple passage of a mature foetus from the womb into the light of day. It is, to be sure, something that comes to fecundic completion in the pain of labour but, as seen above in the commentary on Psalm 50: 7, is essentially constituted by conception. On the basis of the traditional double-creation doctrine, Maximus posits and plays upon a distinction we have encountered in an earlier chapter between *genesis* (generation) and *gennesis* (birth). *Genesis* is related to the creation of the soul and the gift of the divine image by insufflation at the moment of conception. *Gennesis* is related to the formation of the body from already existing blood and semen, also at the moment of conception. The two events are simultaneous, with *genesis* being associated with the *logos* of birth and *gennesis* being associated with the *tropos* of birth. [54]

[54]*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1320a).

At the same time, each possesses its own integral *logos* and *tropos* corresponding to the ontological difference between the two entities: soul and body. [55]

[55] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1321cd). **end p.216**

All this becomes particularly important when Maximus identifies *gennesis*, the second in our scheme, as the precise point as it were by which human beings come to share concretely in 'the likeness to the man of corruption'. [56]

[56] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316d).

The law by which *genesis* comes to pass was a law established before Adam's transgression, and thus was prior to sin. The law of *gennesis*, however, was established 'after the transgression as a result of judgement'. [57]

[57] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1317a).

It is by means of this second 'ignoble' (ἄτιμο) birth, [58]

[58] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1317b).

brought about as it is by the sensual passion invariably involved in sexual intercourse, that everyone who experiences it becomes necessarily subject to the passibility and corruption of human nature resulting from Adam's transgression. Thus the initial order has been reversed. Out of sheer necessity man now receives his blameless *genesis* from ignoble *gennesis*.

Let us now see how Maximus brings these distinctions together in a single passage. Once again it is significant that the discussion takes place in a christological context in which we find him using the Adam/Christ typology to explain the significance of Christ's 'stripping the principalities and powers' (Col. 2: 15). It is through the lens supplied by the Word's own incarnation as Christ that Maximus contemplates what is basically the presupposition of empirical human existence:

When without any change in himself the divine Word clothed himself with our nature and became a perfect human being…he brought the first Adam to light by the way in which he was generated and born. The first man, who received being from God and was made according to the same *genesis* of being, was free from corruption and sin, for they were not created along with him. But when he sinned by transgressing the commandment he condemned himself to a birth (*gennesis*) contracted through passion and sin. Because of this all subsequent natural generation (*genesis*) is held in the passibility of sin, as in a kind of law. According to this law, no one is free from the effects of sin, since each of us is subject by nature to the law of being born, a law introduced alongside generation because of sin. [59]

[59] *Q.Thal*. 21.5-18 (CCSG 7. 127).

In this scheme human *genesis*, that is, human nature's very coming into being from God, is governed by and coincides with a birth 'contracted through passion and sin'. Hence its ontological foundation, originating as it does in a morally questionable source, **end p.217** is unstable. Having preferred what is pleasant and manifest to the senses in place of the intelligible and as yet invisible good,

the first man abandoned this deifying and divine and incorporeal birth and was condemned as appropriate to be subject to a bodily birth which is involuntary, material and perishable. God determined by worthy judgement that he who deliberately chose the inferior instead of the superior should exchange his free, impassible, autonomous and holy birth for one which is passible, servile, and subject to necessity like the irrational

and unintelligent animals, and that he should swap the divine and ineffable honour with God for the life of dishonour on the same material level as the dumb beasts. [60]

[60] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348a).

We have I think sufficiently captured the sense of the Adamic dilemma as Maximus portrays it. The law of being born from the union of male and female plunges its offspring into a downward spiral towards non-existence, as Christopher Wordsworth expressed it in his evening hymn, 'Onward to darkness and to death we tend.' Human *genesis* moves inexorably ἐκ φθορα καὶ εἰ φθορὰν—'taking its beginning from corruption and meeting its end in corruption'. [61]

[61] *Or.dom*. 406 (CCSG 23. 51).

Adam's brief course on earth is marked by the constant vacillation between pleasure and pain, a vacillation itself engendered by his own somatocentric self-love and failure to love the good. But Adam is no distant figure of the shady past. He is, as Blowers aptly remarks, 'a prototype of the monk in his or her ascetic struggles, and his humanity is an antitype of the *new* eschatological humanity of the Second Adam'. [62]

[62] 'Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), 57-85, here 66.

It remains now for us to explore the redemptive flip-side to this equation.

BAPTISMAL REBIRTH AND SPIRITUAL RENOVATION

Having referred obliquely just now to baptism as the redemptive 'flip-side' to the cycle of birth and death propagated by sexual reproduction, we may go on to qualify our meaning by citing Maximus' observation that by virtue of its immediate relation to the incarnation, baptism brings about 'the annulment and dissolution of bodily birth' (εἰ ἀθέτησιν καὶ λύσιν τη ἐκ σωμάτων

end p.218

γεννήσεω). [63]

[63] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348c).

But what is the connection between the incarnation, baptism, and the dissolution of bodily birth?

At one point at least the connection is suggested to Maximus by a passage in Gregory Nazianzen's Epiphany sermon *On Holy Baptism*. In it Gregory says that 'the Word knows three births for us: one from the body, one by baptism, and one by resurrection'. [64]

[64] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 40.2.1-2 (SC 358. 198).

But when he goes on to explain these three births, Gregory apparently adds a fourth, or at least, he splits the first—the birth from the body—into two aspects: 'the initial and life-giving insufflation', and 'his incarnation'. [65]

[65] Greg.Naz. *Or*. 40.2.12-13 (SC 358. 200).

It is in dealing with this question of three or four births that Maximus provides some of his most remarkable reflections on the connection between Christ's own birth, Christian baptism, and the dissolution of bodily birth inherited from Adam. [66]

[66] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1316a-1349b).

The two aspects of the birth from the body represent to Maximus the dual nature of human birth, consisting as it does on the one hand in *genesis*—linked as we have seen with the divine insufflation as the creation of the soul in the image of God, and on the other hand in *gennesis*—linked with the formation (*plasis*) of the body from already existing matter. These two aspects are in turn linked with the two dimensions of the divine Word's becoming a human being through condescension (*synkatabasis—genesis*) and self-emptying (*kenosis—gennesis*). But since the Word's *genesis* springs not from the corruption inherently resulting from sexual union, but rather from a supernatural conception wrought without male seed, the second part of his birth, the *gennesis*, is transformed. In this way Christ becomes 'the new Adam' who, by 'causing the second and dishonourable birth [*gennesis*] to become salvific and restorative of the first and honourable [*genesis*], also established the first [*genesis*] as constitutive and preservative of the second [*gennesis*]'. [67]

[67]*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1317ab).

In 'honouring bodily birth' [68]

[68]*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1320c).

for us like this, the Word willingly suffered to be subject to the natural passions inseparable from this kind of birth. But he did so freely: without necessity, and without sin. So while in his *genesis* he received through insufflation the sinlessness natural to a created soul, he did not assume incorruptibility (τὸ ἄφθαρτον οὐ προσέλαβε). And while in his *gennesis* he **end p.219** received the passibility natural to bodily birth as a result of judgement, he has not assumed its sinful aspect (τὸ ἁμαρτητικὸν οὐ προσείληφε), that is, its tendency to sin. [69]

[69] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1317a).

Thus he 'powerfully healed both births'—*genesis* and *gennesis*:

On the one hand he made his *gennesis* the means by which *genesis* is saved, paradoxically restoring by the passibility associated with it the incorruptibility of *genesis*. And moreover, on the other hand, he established his *genesis* as the means of preserving *gennesis*, sanctifying its passible dimension by the sinlessness of *genesis*. His purpose was to recover *genesis* completely, confirming nature by the divinely perfect *logos* of his *genesis*, and to liberate completely the nature of *gennesis* that had fallen by birth because of sin—by means of the fact that his *gennesis* was not governed by the eruptive mode of seed, as is the case with all the rest who live on earth. [70]

[70]*Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1317bc).

In the light of this train of thought, the constitutive place of Jesus' conception and birth from a virgin, and their function in the redemptive task of reconciling male and female in Christ, becomes more clear. In the body of the Virgin Mary is contracted a new mode of human generation and birth that restores fallen human generation and birth to its properly natural, created *logos*. Mary's fiat is the 'word of faith by which everything that is beyond nature and knowledge is naturally achieved'. [71]

[71] *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1313d).

Since no sexual pleasure precedes the Lord's conception and birth, Maximus sees in the virgin birth the dissolution of those provisional laws of nature that from Adam's fall have bound humanity to a mode of generation contracted through sexual intercourse and thus 'from corruption, to corruption'. [72]

[72]*Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1276a).

For God's conception was entirely without seed, and his birth untouched by corruption. That is why even after the birth of the one born from her Mary remained a virgin, or rather throughout the birth remained unharmed—a paradox departing from every law and principle of nature. In fact through his birth, God—who deemed it worthy to be born in flesh taken from her—actually tightened the bonds of virginity in her, though she was a mother…. For it was absolutely essential for the creator of nature to correct that nature through himself by dissolving those primary laws of nature by means of which sin, through disobedience, had condemned human beings to receive their succession from one another in precisely the same way as the irrational animals. [73]

[73] *Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1276ab). **end p.220**

Virginal birth, that is, the paradoxical coming into existence of a sinless and naturally passible human being whose natural orientation is toward well-being, has in Christ been constituted as the definitive and exclusive means by which man and the cosmos are to be redeemed and 'the upper world filled'. [74]

[74] *Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1276b-1276d).

Here then lies the connection between the incarnation and Christian baptism. Baptism effects the dissolution of the 'involuntary, material, and perishable' birth of the body, and incorporates the subject into Christ's own 'deifying, divine, and incorporeal birth': [75]

[75] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348a).

He who is good and the lover of humankind willingly entered as a human being into our transgression, and voluntarily condemned himself along with us—he who alone is free and sinless. And consenting to be born by bodily birth, wherein lay the power of our condemnation, he mystically corrected it by the Spirit, and having loosed the bonds of bodily birth in himself on our behalf, he has through the birth of the Spirit and according to his will 'given to those who believe in his name'—to us—'power to become the children of God' (John 1: 12) instead of children of flesh and blood. [76]

[76] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348c).

The Lord's own bodily birth bestows on the baptized the birth that their fallen human state failed to provide—one brought about not by the carnal desire of a woman for a man, but 'the birth through baptism in the Spirit for my salvation and restoration by grace'.

Baptism brings about human nature's 're-formation' (ἀνάπλασι), [77]

[77] *Amb.Io*. 42 (PG 91. 1348d).

and thus provides the stable ontological foundation for the moral quest.

It is from this perspective that we can now return to the problem of sexual differentiation and the dialectic of pleasure and pain. By his bodily birth Christ restores to human nature

that 'other way' for human beings to increase, thereby 'expelling (ἐξωθούμενο) the difference and division of nature into male and female'. [78]

[78] *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1309a). Maximus uses both διάφορα (distinction) and διαίρεσι (division) in reference to sexual differentiation, and in this particular sentence speaks of τὴν κατὰ τὸ ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ διαφοράν τε καὶ διαίρεσιν. Thus Thunberg's insistence that the two terms for Maximus signify 'two completely different concepts' (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 57) cannot be maintained in this context.

The existence of the baptized is thus governed and defined not by a principle of male and female, a principle marked by division and **end p.221** opposition, but by the principle of *anthropos*: simple human being. [79]

[79] *Amb.Io*. 41 (PG 91. 1305d, 1309d-1312a).

Yet as we have been eager to prove, the negative and provisional character of sexual differentiation seems to lie not in the fact of genital distinction per se, but in the physical necessity of receiving an ontologically unstable existence on account of carnal reproduction, and the egocentric sexual opposition—concretely experienced in the existential dialectic between pleasure and pain—such reproduction propagates. This reminds us of what we pointed out earlier, that the reconciliation or union between male and female does not require the abolition of physical distinctions but is primarily a matter of knowledge and will; it is a matter of recognizing the single human nature common to all, male and female, and of practising the dispassionate relating to one another such recognition entails:

Whoever is perfect in love and has come to the summit of imperturbability knows no difference (οὐκ ἐπίσταται διαφορὰν) between what it is his own or what is another's, between believer or unbeliever, slave or free, or indeed between male or female. Rather, having risen above the tyranny of the passions and attending only to the one nature common to all people, he regards all people equally, and is equally disposed toward all. For there is in him 'neither Greek and Jew, nor male and female, nor slave and free, but Christ is all and is in all' (Gal. 3: 28; Col. 3: 11). [80]

[80] *Car*. 2.30 (PG 90. 993b).

Our comments so far may be illuminated further by examining a number of important passages in which Maximus likens the male/female dichotomy to that of the passions associated with the soul's irascible and concupiscible faculties respectively. Aggression (θυμ΄ο) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) stand in an analogous relationship with male and female not least of all because, like sexual differentiation, they and the other passions 'were not originally created together with human nature, or else they would contribute to the definition of that nature'. [81]

[81] *Q.Thal*. 1.5-7 (CCSG 7. 47).

On this score Maximus explicitly defers to the authority of the Nyssene, [82]

[82] Greg.Nyss. *Virg*. 12.2.1-70 (SC 119. 398-410).

admitting with him that the passions were 'introduced on account of the fall from perfection, being attached to the more irrational part of human nature'. [83]

[83] *Q.Thal*. 1.7-10 (CCSG 7. 47).

In the carnally generated, these passions manifest **end p.222** themselves as a penchant for deviance. [84]

[84] See *QD* 93.1-10 (CCSG 10. 72).

Aggression typically destroys the exercise of reason, whereas desire 'sets up flesh as more desirable than spirit and renders the enjoyment of visible phenomena more delightful than the glory and brightness of intelligible realities'. [85]

[85] *Or.dom*. 343-50 (CCSG 23. 47).

Again, there is no trouble with the actual faculties themselves or the natural passions. The tendencies of the natural and blameless passions for which we are not responsible (οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν)—the passionate drives, the natural appetites and pleasures—in themselves do not

bring guilt upon those who experience them. They are a 'necessary consequence' (ἀ ναγκαῖον παρακολούθημα) of our created condition. [86]

[86]*Q.Thal*. 55.123-7 (CCSG 7. 487).

Indeed, they can even 'become good in the earnest—once they have wisely severed them from corporeal objects and used them to gain possession of heavenly things'. [87]

[87]*Q.Thal*. 1.18-20 (CCSG 7. 47).

But under the influence of the liability which Maximus dubs 'generic sin' (γενικὴ ἁμαρτί α) [88]

[88]*Q.Thal*. 21.30 (CCSG 7. 127).

these natural passions have become the means by which the will, on account of nature's passibility, is impelled towards the corruption associated with the unnatural passions. [89]

[89]*Q.Thal*. 21.30-5 (CCSG 7. 127-9).

Hence in the opposition between aggression and desire brought about by the disordered relation of the soul's faculties both to reason (above) and to the material world (below) the soul itself becomes involved in conflicting and contrary dispositions. This is fallen humanity's normal experience. This, like the dichotomy between male and female, is 'second nature'. [90]

[90]Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul', 69.

But just as baptism is the point at which the opposition between male and female is reconciled under the single *logos* of *anthropos*, so is it the means by which the distinct activities of the irascible and concupiscible faculties become subordinated to the hegemony of reason and so, under that single *logos*, function harmoniously without opposition. Elijah's successful advance toward God supplies an exemplary type of this at-once ascetic and sacramental self-configuration to Christ:

When he reached the point of having life, movement, and being in Christ, he put far from him the monstrous *genesis* from inequalities, no longer bearing in himself the contrary dispositions of these passions in the way of male and female, lest his reason, changed along with their unstable fluctuations, be enslaved to them. [91]

[91]*Or.dom*. 381-7 (CCSG 23. 50).end p.223

With clear baptismal overtones, the rational soul, empowered with divine knowledge, is then said to discard the weaker *genesis* and replace it with the superior by guarding in itself its graced equality with God along with the concrete realization (τὴν ὑ πόστασιν) of the gifts it has received. It is at the level of this concrete realization that, in an expression echoing that most centripetal Maximian motif,

Christ wills always mystically to be born and to become incarnate through those being saved, thereby turning the soul that gives him birth into a virgin mother who, putting it concisely, is without the marks of nature subject to generation and corruption as in the relation of male and female. [92]

[92] *Or.dom*. 397-402 (CCSG 23. 50).

It is no surprise that we recognize here also a theme dear to Gregory of Nyssa. In his treatise *On Virginity*, Gregory says:

What happened corporeally in the case of the immaculate Mary, when 'the fullness of the Godhead' (Col. 2: 9) shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul when it gives birth to Christ spiritually, although the Lord no longer effects a bodily presence. For Scripture says, 'we know Christ no longer according to the flesh' (2 Cor. 5: 16), but, as the Gospel says somewhere (cf. John 14: 23), he—and the Father along with him—dwells with us. [93]

[93] Greg.Nyss. *Virg*. 2.2.18-25 (SC 119. 268).

Each Christian, by virtue of baptism, is called to a new kind of procreation in which the soul as both virgin and mother gives birth to Christ 'spiritually' (κατὰ λόγον). For Maximus, we notice however, the Christ who is born of the virgin soul is made flesh in the fully corporeal practice of the virtues. While this is a vocation by no means exclusive to the physically virginal, physical celibacy more closely typifies and prophetically embodies the pregnant virginity of the soul. What is achieved by baptism is not the elimination of a person's gender or sexual, bodily identity, but the dissolution of his or her subjection to a *genesis* 'from corruption, to corruption'. Baptism liberates nature not from its given bodily characteristics (though eventually these are 'overwhelmed by the transcendence of glory'),[94]

[94] *Th.Oec*. 2.88 (PG 90. 1168b).

but from 'the symptomatic passions' (τὰ σημαντικὰ πάθη)—aggression and lust—that are indicative of carnal *genesis*. For these are passions which

do not belong to the life of Christ and the logic according to Christ—if that is we can believe him who said, 'for in Christ Jesus there is no male and **end p.224** female' (Gal. 3: 28; Col. 3: 11). By these words he clearly indicates the signs and passions (τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ πάθη) of that nature subject to corruption and generation. Instead there is only a single deiform principle created by divine knowledge, and a single movement of will that chooses virtue alone.[95]

[95] *Or.dom*. 406-14 (CCSG 23. 51).

Let us at this point now turn to see what particular aspects of the incarnation Maximus envisages as overcoming the related dialectic of pleasure and pain. We recall that under Adam deviant physical pleasure is the means by which sin has fastened itself to the root of human nature.[96]

[96] *Q.Thal*. 61.165-71 (CCSG 22. 95).

In just response God has providentially and punitively attached pain (and with it, death) to pleasure to bring an end to nature and so limit the escalation of evil. Unlawful pleasure has its necessary end in lawful death,[97]

[97] *Q.Thal*. 61.36-76 (CCSG 22. 87-9).

for pleasure is, we remember, 'the mother of death'. Both pleasure and pain gain their actual, operative force through nature's corporeal passibility, so that in the hands of sin and death passibility functions as a weapon against nature.[98]

[98] *Q.Thal*. 61.90 (CCSG 22. 89).

Yet it is this very threat of death which again drives nature to find solace in pleasure. In a kind of macabre, tragic twist, humanity is slave to a sorry plot.

Christ's own birth, life, and death bring about an almost exact symmetrical reversal of the above pattern. This reversal begins as we have seen with his birth from a virgin. Because his beginning does not issue from unlawful pleasure, sin and death cannot 'use' his natural passibility—a state he voluntarily assumes—as a 'weapon' to effect death. Instead the Word takes on passibility as an effective weapon which he wields to remove sin and death from nature.[99]

[99] *Q.Thal*. 61.77-90 (CCSG 22. 89).

Just as Adam introduced to all humanity a source of generation issuing from pleasure and ending in death, so Christ by his birth introduces another, more original source of generation by the Holy Spirit, in which 'all those who are mystically regenerated from him by the Spirit' are liberated from the liabilities incurred through Adam's generation. These then 'no longer have Adam's pleasure of generation, but only the pain from Adam

that effects death in them, yet not as a penalty for sin, but as a dispensation against sin…'. [100]

[100] *Q.Thal*. 61.109-41 (CCSG 22. 91-3).

Christ breaks the inevitable, destructive cycle of pleasure (birth) and pain (death) instigated by Adam by separating **end p.225** their relation as cause to effect through his virginal, impassible birth and his freely chosen death. With these words we are already anticipating a theme we shall address in the final section of this chapter. At this stage we should like simply to point out how it is a distinctly baptismal theme that arises from the dramatic reversal of the Adamic dispensation wrought through the life and death of the incarnate Word.

The actual temptations of Jesus also feature centrally as salvifically-charged moments whose redemptive significance lies chiefly in the way they undo Adam's surrender to diabolical seduction. In the incarnate Word's passibility, a corollary of his existence as a flesh and blood human being, there is presented to 'the principalities and powers' (Col. 2: 15) an apparently easy target for their deceitful schemes. [101]

[101] *Q.Thal*. 21.45-52 (CCSG 7. 129).

Their first wave of assault comes to the Lord in the wilderness through his experience of pleasure. Maximus does not indicate precisely what such pleasure involved, but it is likely he means the spiritual pleasure Christ enjoyed in living 'by every word that comes from the mouth of God'. The tempter tries to pervert this pleasure by tempting Christ to appease his carnal appetite. It is to this temptation, it seems, that Maximus has Christ proving 'impregnable and untouchable'. [102]

[102] *Q.Thal*. 21.55 (CCSG 7. 129).

Through this victory he 'brings the evil powers to nought' [103]

[103] *Q.Thal*. 21.70-2 (CCSG 7. 131).

and 'presents to us all he corrected as good. For even he was not prevented from experiencing temptations relating to pleasure…. Rather he summoned to himself the evil power present in our temptations that he might absorb the attack, putting to death the power that thought it could seize him as it had Adam at the beginning.' [104]

[104] *Q.Thal*. 21.56-62 (CCSG 7. 129).

Having defeated the adversaries in his first experience of temptation, the Lord in his passion allows them to advance a second wave of attack in the form of pain and suffering. We are struck in the following explanation by the significance Maximus thrice attributes to 'the moment of his death' [105]

[105] κατὰ τὸν τοῦ θανάτου καιρὸν (*Q.Thal*. 21.79 (CCSG 7. 131)); κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ θανάτου (*Q.Thal*. 21.89-90 (CCSG 7. 131)); ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τοῦ θανάτου (*Q.Thal*. 21.96 (CCSG 7. 131)).

at which point the public 'stripping' of the principalities and powers (Col. 2: 15) is definitively enacted:

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He did this in order that, having completely destroyed in himself the corrupting arrow of their evil, he might consume it like a fire, completely abolishing it from nature, 'stripping the principalities and powers' by his timely death on the cross, while remaining impregnable to sufferings, or rather showing himself formidable in death, detaching from nature the passibility of pain…. Hence on the one hand the Lord escaped from the principalities and powers by his first experience of temptation in the wilderness, healing in its entirety nature's susceptibility to pleasure. And on the other hand, he stripped them at the moment of this death, similarly detaching from nature its susceptibility to pain. Out

of his love for humankind he made nature's correction, which is our responsibility, his own; or rather in his goodness he reckoned to us the record of his own good deeds.[106]

[106] *Q.Thal*. 21.76-93 (CCSG 7. 131).

The Lord's escalating agony from Gethsemane to Golgotha not only fails to yield an opening for the demons to spawn their evil domination, but actually functions as 'his means for consuming our culpable passions in his refining fire, the new Adam pioneering his eschatological humanity…'.[107]

[107] Blowers, 'The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor', 371.

Only in baptism is this grace-filled 'opportunity' (*kairos*) that the Word exploited in time to condemn sin in the flesh 'in general' (γενικω) made accessible at the level of the particular (ἰδικω).[108]

[108] *Q.Thal*. 61.236-41 (CCSG 22. 99).

We are reminded that as long as we are in this body baptism is as much about death as it is about resurrection; or rather, baptism initiates bodily human beings into a divine mode of life whose corporeal contours are experienced primarily under the form of suffering, hardship, trial, and death. But just as the experience of Adamic pleasure is the mother of death, so this experience of baptismal suffering and death, which is actually nothing else than real participation in the death of the Lord and anticipation of his resurrection, is 'the father of everlasting life'.[109]

[109] *Q.Thal*. 61.137-41 (CCSG 22. 93).

FAITH, LOVE, AND THE USE OF THE PASSIONS

At this point we temporarily suspend discussion on baptismal participation in the death of Christ until our final section. In the intervening comments however in which we examine the relation between faith, love, and the use of the passions, our focus on **end p.227** baptism and the bodily dimensions of the deified life will be no less pronounced.

We may start by citing Sherwood who declares that the benefits bestowed in baptism, summarized by Larchet as purification, illumination, and filial, deifying adoption,[110]

[110] *La divinisation de l'homme*, 415-17.

possess in Maximus' view a provisional, conditional character.[111]

[111] Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 78.

Baptism grants adoption as a potentiality—a 'seed' (σπέρμα). Its fertilization and flowering depend on the will and actions of the believing subject.[112]

[112] *Q.Thal*. 6.1-51 (CCSG 7. 69-71).

Restored free will (*proairesis*) acts as 'the guardian and keeper of adoption, the gracious divine birth given from above by the Spirit', and 'by the careful observance of the commandments adorns the beauty given by grace'.[113]

[113] *Or.dom*. 97-102 (CCSG 23. 32).

In so far as we remain subject to the passions, 'we have not perfectly attained forgiveness of sins. For we were freed through holy baptism from ancestral sin; but from the sin we have had the effrontery to commit after baptism we are freed through repentance.'[114]

[114] *LA* 44.1013-17 (CCSG 40. 119).

In Maximus' theology this relationship between the potential and actual, between the reception of baptismal grace and the keeping of the commands, corresponds to the relationship between faith and love. It is therefore our purpose in this section to tease out

further the implications of this relationship for the bodily life and for the reorientation and right use of the natural passions.

In classical philosophy *pistis* represented a vastly inferior means of knowing. According to E. R. Dodds, '[t]o anyone brought up on classical Greek philosophy, *pistis* meant the lowest grade of cognition: it was the state of mind of the uneducated, who believe things on hearsay without being able to give reasons for their belief'. [115]

[115] *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 121.

But as Dodds goes on to point out, from the time of Porphyry on in Neoplatonic circles, *pistis* functions as 'a basic requirement,…the first condition of the soul's approach to God'. [116]

[116]Ibid., 122.

Likewise for Maximus faith is 'the first premise in matters of religion, assuring the one who possesses it that God and divine realities really exist. In doing so it gives more certainty than our eyes which, by looking on the appearances of sensible phenomena, only form an opinion (δόξαν) about them for those

end p.228 who see.' [117]

[117]*Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 393cd).

Yet while faith is only the first step on the way to union with God, it far surpasses physical sight in that it actually grants union with God. [118]

[118]*Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1245d-1248a).

For Maximus as for other Christian thinkers, *pistis* constitutes a direct form of knowledge superior even to that of the intellect. Indeed, following Dionysius Maximus calls faith a divinely bestowed way of knowing that is 'beyond mind'. He echoes the definition of faith in Hebrews 11: 1 when he says that 'faith alone embraces the [divine] mysteries since it is the concrete realization (ὑπόστασι) of things beyond mind and reason'. [119]

[119]*Cap. XV* (PG 90. 1184cd). See also *Th.Oec*. 1.9.

Rather than the mind taking the lead, faith takes *nous* by the hand and 'induces it to accede to God (πείθει τῷ Θεῷ προσχωρεῖν τὸν νοῦν)'. [120]

[120]*Q.Thal*. 49.28 (CCSG 7. 351).

Maximus even equates faith with Christ, its object: ' "The word of faith" (Rom. 10: 8) that we seek is Christ himself.'[121] He is *subsistent faith* (ἡ ἐνυπόστατο πίστι): in him we see in concrete, realized actuality what faith really is. [122]

As in Gregory of Nyssa, the phrase 'faith alone' functions as an important technical term in Maximus' apophatic theology. [123]

[123]See Laird, ' "By Faith Alone": A Technical Term in Gregory of Nyssa', 61-79.

The exclusivity of faith, however, is not opposed to faith and works, but to faith and other forms of knowledge. In other words, 'faith alone' is an epistemological assertion. So in the context of engaging the *mysterium Christi*, when Maximus asks how it is that God becomes flesh yet remains true God, and how, remaining true God, he is true man in such a way that the integrity of neither his divine nor human nature is compromised, he answers: 'faith alone grasps these things, honouring in silence the Word, to whose [divine] nature no principle from the realm of being corresponds'. [124]

[124]*Amb.Th*. 5.230 (CCSG 48. 31).

The incarnation presents to the natural human faculties realities that can only be known supernaturally, in a way 'beyond mind'. 'Knowledge finds its conviction in faith alone, a faith possessed by those who genuinely worship the mystery of Christ.' [125]

125 *Amb.Th*. 5.174-6 (CCSG 48. 28).

Faith's proper stance before God is one of silent adoration and doxological confession. **end p.229**

But while Maximus accords remarkable status and power to 'faith alone' (πίστι μόνη), he is equally adamant that 'mere faith'—ἡ ψιλὴ πίστι—is inadequate for salvation:

'Do not say', says divine Jeremiah, 'that you are the Lord's temple' (Jer. 7: 4). Nor then ought you to say, 'mere faith in our Lord Jesus Christ can save me'. For this is impossible unless you acquire love for him through works. For in what concerns mere believing, 'even the demons believe and tremble' (Jas. 2: 19).[126]

126 *Car*. 1.39 (PG 90. 968c); cf. 1.31 (PG 90. 968a).

Again in the words of the monastic master he speaks largely to the same effect, though adds some detail as to what right believing might entail:

Now perhaps someone will say, 'I have faith, and faith in him is enough for salvation.' But James contradicts him, saying 'even the demons believe and tremble' (Jas. 2: 19), and again, 'faith' by itself 'without works is dead' (Jas. 2: 26), as are works without faith.[127]

127 The addition 'as are works without faith' may come from Greg.Naz. *Or*. 40.45.46-7 (SC 358. 306).

In what manner then do we believe in him? Is it that we believe him about future things, but about transient and present things do not believe him, and are therefore immersed in the material world, living by the flesh and warring against the Spirit? But those who truly believed Christ and, through the commandments, made him to dwell wholly within themselves spoke in this way: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life I live now in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2: 20). That is why they suffered for his sake for the salvation of all…. In their words and deeds, Christ, who works in them, was made manifest.[128]

128 *LA* 34.639-60 (CCSG 40. 73-7).

This distinction between faith 'by itself' (καθ᾽ ἑαυτὴν) or *fides nuda*, and what Maximus' later scholiasts would call ἡ ἐνυπόστατο πίστι or *fides subsistens*,[129]

129 See *Scholium* 3, *Q.Thal*. 25.8-11 (CCSG 7. 167).

may be illumined further by returning to a passage we discussed in an earlier chapter in which we examined the distinction Maximus draws between image and likeness, suggested by the subtle difference between Genesis 1: 26 and 1: 27. There we saw that Maximus envisages two ways of being born from God, or at least speaks of the one birth from God under two aspects. In the first God gives the whole grace of adoption, but only as a potentiality (δυνάμει). In the second this same *virtual* grace

end p.230 of adoption becomes an actuality (κατ᾽ ἐνέργειαν). The first mode of birth grants grace 'potentially present as faith alone'. The second 'brings about in addition to faith the most divine likening' to God.[130]

130 *Q.Thal*. 6.8-16 (CCSG 7. 69).

The all-important and necessary addition of actual likeness to God turns upon the subjective orientation of the human will, or, if you will, upon the exercise of faith. As long as the human will is bound up in carnal attachments, as long as it retains even an occasional inclination to sin, grace remains unrealized at the level of potentiality, 'for the

Holy Spirit does not give birth to an unwilling will (γνώμην μὴ θέλουσαν), but reshapes a willing will to bring it to deification'. [131]

[131] *Q.Thal*. 6.21-3 (CCSG 7. 69).

This 'willing will' (γνώμην βουλομένην) is the product of an often long and arduous journey through ascetic practice in which the Christian learns in imitation of Christ to subject himself to the reformative work of the Spirit. Maximus' conclusion reinforces the distinction between 'faith alone' and that fully adorned faith by which grace has been realized in its total actuality:

Hence we may possess the Spirit of adoption, which is the seed intended to endue the begotten with the likeness of him who sowed it, but [at the same time] not possess alongside it a will that has been purified from deviating towards other things. This is why—even after the birth from water and the Spirit—we willingly sin. But if through knowledge we were to equip the will to receive the activity of water and the Spirit, then through ascetic struggle the mystical water would continually cleanse the conscience, and the life-giving Spirit would effect the immutable perfecting of the good in us through experiential knowledge. Therefore it most assuredly remains for each of us, who are still able to sin, to will purely in accordance with our will to surrender our whole lives to the Spirit. [132]

[132] *Q.Thal*. 6.38-51 (CCSG 7. 71).

We find a similar kind of distinction being made again in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 33, although this time the potentiality/actuality distinction is coupled with an inner/outer, invisible/visible distinction. Here Maximus identifies the kingdom of God, said by Jesus to be 'within you' (Luke 17: 21), with faith. But the words 'within you' suggest to the Confessor an important conceptual distinction. Strictly conceived, faith is 'the *invisible* kingdom of God', whereas the kingdom of God is 'faith divinely

end p.231 endued with visible form'. Faith only becomes visible and 'external to us' when it is activated through works, that is, in sum, through keeping the twofold law of love as summarized in the Ten Commandments. [133]

[133] *Q.Thal*. 33.12-19 (CCSG 7. 229).

Until then it remains an invisible, latent, virtual reality. [134]

[134] One of the later *scholia* on this passage confirms the identification of this virtual faith / invisible kingdom with what Maximus calls ἡ ψιλὴ πίστι , 'since it does not possess the divine likeness that comes from the virtues'. See *Scholium* 1 to *Q.Thal*. 33.1-4 (CCSG 7. 231).

This leads Maximus to conclude:

Now if the kingdom of God is this activated faith (ἐνεργουμένη πίστι), and the kingdom of God creates the immediate union of the rulers of that kingdom with God, then faith has been shown clearly to be the relational potential for, or the effectual condition of (δύναμι σχετικὴ ἢ σχέσι δραστικὴ) that perfect, immediate, supernatural union that the believer has with the God in whom he trusts. [135]

[135] *Q.Thal*. 33.19-25 (CCSG 7. 229).

Faith is either a potential (δύναμι) or an actual condition or relation (σχέσι), depending upon the will of the subject in whom it resides.

There is yet another passage that deserves consultation since it serves to connect what we have been saying about 'mere' or virtual faith to Maximus' understanding of faith's

relation to love and the concrete shape the transition from possessing potential grace to possessing actual grace takes in the Christian life. Commenting on Zorubbabel's song of praise facing Jerusalem in 1 Esdras 4: 58-60, Maximus turns for further elucidation to the prophecy in Zechariah 4: 7-10 concerning Zorubbabel's work of restoring the Temple after Israel's Babylonian exile. Having identified Zorubbabel as 'our Lord and God Jesus Christ', Maximus goes on to uncover the multiple layers of application—both christological and ascetico-practical—embedded in the various features of the prophecy:

The 'stone' (Zech. 4: 7) is faith in [Christ]. And it is 'in the hand', because faith in Christ is manifest in the practice of the commandments. For 'faith without works is dead' (Jas. 2: 26), as are works without faith. The hand is clearly the symbol for ascetic practice. Consequently by carrying the stone in his hand the Lord teaches us by example to have faith in him made effectual by its adornment with 'the seven eyes of the Lord' (Zech. 4: 10), that is, with the seven activities of the Holy Spirit. [136]

[136] *Q.Thal.* 54.300-8 (CCSG 7. 461).**end p.232**

It is important to note the connection Maximus makes here between the 'works' of faith and the seven 'activities' (ἐνέργειαι) of the Spirit. Without them as 'eyes', faith remains blind and inoperative. The seven activities, which Maximus expounds in reverse order as fear of God, strength, counsel, understanding, knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom (Isa. 11: 2), are not seven different actions of the one Spirit, but are the graduated, varying effects produced by the Spirit's one, uniform divine activity in the life of the believer. There is in reality no intrinsic difference between the seven activities. Their apparent differences rather reflect the developing faith and growing state of receptivity of the believing subject, whose 'works' actualize, embody, and externalize the hidden, latent faith within him. They are the effects produced by his increasing voluntary activation—in cooperation with the singular work of the Spirit—of the virtual faith planted in him through baptism.

This fact has been studied in more detail in a pair of early and little-known articles on this passage by the Carmelite Joseph a Spiritu Sancto. [137]

[137] Joseph a Spiritu Sancto, 'The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost in Early Greek Theology', *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 26/8 (1926), 820-7 and 26/9 (1926), 930-8.

In them he artfully spells out the precise relationship between faith and the seven ἐνέργειαι of the Spirit, which he calls 'the effects of the Holy Ghost's continuous operation upon the soul…the vibrations of the strings of the soul at the touch of the Holy Ghost'. [138]

[138] 'The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost', 822.

Each effect represents a progressively more advanced stage of spiritual maturity, and is related to faith in terms of the soul's increasing detachment from created things and its subsequent voluntary actuation of faith through works of virtue. The first effect of faith is fear—fear of God's threats and punishments, a fear that compels the believer to exert himself to avoid sin. And, since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1: 7), at the very pinnacle of faith's effects is wisdom. Wisdom is simply fully actuated faith, and therefore equates to a union with God 'beyond mind'. [139]

[139] Ibid., 933.

Wisdom is the goal of faith and so serves as a sign of faith's complete adornment with virtue. Only as wisdom does faith eventually become what it in fact is:

Ascending via these 'eyes' or, as it were, illuminations of faith therefore, we are drawn together into the divine monad of wisdom. By our gradual ascent through the different

virtues we reconcile the differences between the **end p.233** gifts—differences that have come about because of us—uniting them with their very origin. [140]

[140] *Q.Thal*. 54.347-51 (CCSG 7. 463).

If we call these works of faith the charismatic virtues, recognizing them simultaneously both as the effects of the Spirit's one divine operation upon the soul and as the good works manifesting the soul's voluntary actualization of baptismal faith, what can we say about the relationship between faith and the two remaining theological virtues, namely, hope and love?

One of Maximus' most lucid reflections regarding the relationship between the three theological virtues is undoubtedly in his letter on love to John the Cubicularius, the Constantinopolitan courtier. 'Nothing', Maximus is convinced, 'is more truly Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification.' [141]

[141] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 393b).

But 'divine love' as far as he is concerned is not exclusively a divine act toward man. While its source and power are truly divine, it is a fully theandric reality; or rather, the love the Christian has for God and his neighbour is none other than God's own love: they are 'one and the same and universal'. [142]

[142] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 401d).

In 'suffering' this love the human soul becomes an active agent of its all-embracing, deifying force. Whereas faith and hope are related to the attainment of the good as means to an end, and thus have a limited function, love possesses the good *toute entière*. [143]

[143] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91, 405b).

Love is the supreme union in which faith and hope find their true goal:

For faith is the foundation of everything that comes after it, I mean hope and love, and firmly establishes what is true. Hope is the strength of the extremes, I mean faith and love…. But love is the fulfilment of these, wholly embracing the whole of the final object of desire, giving them rest from their movement towards it—from believing something to be and hoping that something will be—and bringing instead, by means of itself, the enjoyment of what is present. [144]

[144] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 396bc). Cf. *Car*. 3.100 (PG 90. 1048a).

At the heart of love—and this is why bare faith without works is 'dead'—is the enfleshment of the Word. Love is the actuated, embodied fullness of what faith tends towards; it is the outward adornment of faith, for in love, 'the most generic' of all the virtues, [145]

[145] *Amb.Io*. 21 (PG 91. 1249b).

God is incarnate and man is deified:**end p.234**

For it is the most perfect work of love and the summit of its activity to make the properties and names of the things united to it fit each other by means of a reciprocal exchange. So the human being is made God and God is called and appears as human…. Love is therefore a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good, since through it God and men are drawn together in the one who has love, and the creator of humankind appears as human through the undeviating likeness of the deified to God in the good, so far as is possible to humankind. [146]

[146] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 401bc).

Good works, consequently, on account of their being the faithful embodiment of divine love, and without any hint of objectifying what the sixteenth-century Reformers much later reacted to as 'works-righteousness', can be said to 'draw down the mercy of God'. [147]

[147]*Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 408a).

Good works are nothing other than God's mercy at work in the flesh. As such they actually function as a means of grace both for those who perform them and for those to whom they are directed. Indeed as Maximus has it, 'the Lord's mercy is hidden in the mercy we show to our neighbour' (τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ κυρίου ἐν τῇ ἐλεημοσύνῃ τοῦ πλησίον ἐγκέκρυπται),[148]

[148]*LA* 42.973-4 (CCSG 40. 115).

meaning not only that God has mercy on others through our having mercy on them, but also that through our works of mercy—forgiveness, almsgiving, intercession, and the like—God has mercy on us! The relation between the two is not one of cause and effect: God does not have mercy on us just because we have mercy on others. It is rather one of identification: our acts of mercy are our living experience of divine mercy. Through them we become paradigms of and for God, flesh and blood examples which we actually call on God to imitate when we pray, 'forgive, as we forgive…'.[149]

[149]*Or.dom*. 651-6 (CCSG 23. 64): καὶ τῷ θεῷ καθίστησιν ἑαυτὸν ἀρετῆς ἐξεμπλάριον, εἰ τοῦτο θέμις εἰπεῖν, πρὸς μίμησιν ἑαυτοῦ τὸν ἀμίμητον ἐλθεῖν ἐγκελευόμενος (and establishes himself as an example of virtue to God, if one may speak this way, inviting him who cannot be imitated to conform to his own imitation).

Love for God and love for neighbour, the sum total of all the commandments, are therefore simply two aspects of the singular subjective experience of the universal divine love in one's own particular, bodily existence.

The opening chapters of Maximus' *Centuries on Love* confirm our present claim that charity is the necessary 'outward vesture' of faith and therefore *is* faith in its subsistent actuality. There in not an altogether infrequent use of a deliberate structural strategy by

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TABLE 2: Chiastic structure of *Capita de caritate* 1.2-3

A **Love** springs from the calm of dispassion;
B **dispassion**, in turn, from hope in God;
C **hope**, from endurance and patience;
D **endurance** and patience, from all-embracing self-mastery,
E and **self-mastery** from fear of God;
F and **fear** from **faith** in the Lord.
F′ He who **believes** the Lord **fears** punishment,
E′ and he who fears punishment **masters** his passions;
D′ he who masters his passions **endures** tribulations,
C′ while he who endures tribulations will acquire **hope** in God;
B′ hope in God **separates the mind** from every earthbound **passion**,
A′ and the mind thus separated will acquire **love** for God.

Maximus we find 'faith in the Lord' at the centre of a chiastic arrangement of which love forms the outermost frame.[150]

[150] *Car*. 1.2-3 (PG 90. 961b).

While Sherwood has noted the inverse symmetrical structure of these verses, [151]

[151] Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 248 n. 2.

in no study to my knowledge have they been set out diagramatically to accentuate their form. In an elaborate literary construct the formal relationship between the three primary theological virtues is vividly illustrated. In comparing this arrangement to what we have called the charismatic virtues we notice again how fear (φόβος) of God's punishment immediately follows upon faith. Such fear however spurs the believer on to master the passions (ἐγκράτεια), from which point he progresses through patient endurance in tribulations (ὑπομονή), hope (ἐλπί), and separation from earthly attachments (ἀπάθεια) towards the fullness of love for God (ἀγάπη). Divine love and wisdom are thus seen to be the same: they are fully clothed, effectual faith; perfect union with God; actual deification. Joseph a Spiritu Sancto's summary comments are especially pertinent in this connection: **end p.236**

Thus, the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, mark three stages by which man apprehends God in a closer and closer immediate contact with Him, whereas the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost accentuate man's gradual approach to the union with God from the more human side of this mysterious process, in so far as they make us see how, in a soul that is responsive to the energies of the Holy Ghost, the practice of moral virtue in daily life becomes more perfect, more connatural, more divine, so that finally every virtuous act becomes a reflex of a divine perfection. Both the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost and the three theological virtues are the result in man's soul of the continuous, uniform activity of the Spirit of God. The beginning of this activity is faith, and its apex is love or wisdom. [152]

[152]'The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost', 937-8.

It is but a small step to move on from here to consider how the soul's various passible faculties and the passions to which it is naturally subject are involved in this fully incarnate exercise and experience of divine love. In his *Centuries on Love* Maximus famously speaks of the need for 'the blessed passion of holy love' (τοῦ μακαρίου πάθου τῆς ἁγία ἀγάπη) that binds the intellect to spiritual realities, at the same time persuading it to prefer immaterial, intelligible, and divine realities to those of matter and sense. [153]

[153]*Car*. 3.67 (PG 90. 1037ab).

There also we find a distinction between 'the blameworthy (ψεκτὸν) passion of love' that engrosses the mind in material things, and 'the praiseworthy (ἐπαινετὸν) passion of love' that binds it to divine things. [154]

[154]*Car*. 3.71 (PG 90. 1037c).

It is called a passion because as we have pointed out divine love is as much 'suffered' as it is enacted: in enacting it, we suffer it. Yet it is also an all-encompassing generic passion that by nature excludes any other competing or opposing 'love'. This radical, single-minded, and exclusive devotion constitutes the very definition of what it means to love God. He who has his mind fixed on love for God 'disdains all visible things as alien, even his own body'. [155]

[155]*Car*. 1.6 (PG 90. 961c).

It would be wrong to conclude from such a strong statement however that the body is thereby excluded from participating in the fully integral union concretely realized in love for God and neighbour. As Thunberg has observed, the good use of the concupiscible and irascible faculties of the soul, typically associated with love for God and love for neighbour respectively, features as a primary component in the bodily manifestation of God as love. [156]

[156]Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 102-3. **end p.237**

To risk being repetitive: in being deified, man does not leave his passible faculties behind. On the contrary, 'charity implies that this "passibility" be restored from its perversion and transformed, and that it thus accompany man through all his life as a human being'. [157]

[157] Ibid., 104.

Even those passions that only on account of the fall were grafted into the more irrational part of nature such as pleasure, pain, desire, grief, and the like, are through the reorienting and purifying work of ascetic struggle and contemplation able to be brought under the mediating hegemony of divinely informed reason and so transformed in character. Maximus explains this shift in the moral status of the passions in terms of the proper 'use' (χρησι) of the passible faculties, by this time a well-worn Platonic moral code. [158]

[158]Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 63.

The passions are transformed because the manner in which the soul uses its natural faculties has altered at the most fundamental level. We can follow Maximus' essentially christocentric thinking on this matter by looking at his answer to Thalassius' perplexing question as to whether such passions are inherently evil, or whether their moral status is capable of changing with their use. We notice in this discussion that the moral status of the passions is contingent above all upon the moral status of the soul using them:

Obviously the passions become good in the zealous (ἐν τοι σπουδαίοι) once they have wisely severed them from corporeal objects and put them to work to acquire heavenly things. For example, they turn desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) into an appetitive movement of the intellectual desire for divine things, pleasure (ἡδονὴν) into a harmless joy over the activity of the mind enchanted with the divine gifts, fear (φόβον) into a preventative concern about the retributive punishment to come, and grief (λύπην) into a corrective repentance in the face of evil in the present…. Thus the passions happen to be good when used by those who 'take captive every thought for obedience to Christ' (2 Cor. 10: 5). [159]

[159] *Q.Thal*. 1.18-33 (CCSG 7. 47-9).

Paul Blowers has made this transformation of the passions the object of a special study in which he concludes that the created passions, which for Maximus are 'gentiles' in the native territory of the soul, retain a 'contingent presence' in the lived story of human nature. Nevertheless, 'despite their deviance in connection with the abuse of free will, they still constitute a crucial vehicle by which *incarnational* grace is embodied in the farthest reaches of the **end p.238** cosmic order…'. [160]

[160]Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul', 57.

The Christian struggle to embody divine love does not exclude the passions from the union of the soul with God but rather relies on them as a 'crucial vehicle' through which this union is attained in its created, incarnate integrity. The good use of the soul's faculties eventually leads to that future reversal of the corrupt state when flesh will be

'swallowed up by the soul in Spirit, and the soul swallowed up by God who is the true life so that the soul will possess the whole of God and radiate him alone throughout its entire being'. [161]

[161] *Amb.Io*. 22 (PG 91. 1252a).

The passible faculties, whose means of operation depend on the bodily senses, are therefore morally neutral, depending on their use. Their right use is determined not only by the subjective moral intent of the particular soul using them, but also by the harmony of that intent and use with the divinely ordained nature of the faculties themselves. This principle extends beyond the soul's faculties to include all created things. Scripture takes away nothing given by God for our use: it forbids neither eating, having children, nor the possession and right management of goods. Rather it restrains immoderation and corrects their irrational use—such as gluttony, fornication, and greed—vices that arise out of an empassioned (ἐμπαθω) relationship with created things. [162]

[162] *Car*. 4.66 (PG 90. 1064b).

The vices, whether of the concupiscible, irascible, or rational faculties, come upon us through the misuse (κατὰ παράχρησιν) of the soul's faculties. Misuse of the rational faculty is ignorance and folly; misuse of the irascible and concupiscible faculties is hatred and intemperance. But the right use of these faculties is knowledge and prudence, love and moderation. And if this is the case, then nothing created and brought into being by God is evil. It is not food that is evil, but gluttony. It is not having children that is evil, but fornication; not possessions, but greed; not reputation, but vainglory. And if this is the case, then there is nothing evil in created beings except their misuse, which itself stems from the intellect's neglect of its own natural cultivation. [163]

[163] *Car*. 3.3-4 (PG 90. 1017cd).

Even the human being's most basic bodily appetite for food, the crux in man's fall, is capable of a fully 'spiritual' use that does not imply bodily starvation and abuse. As Maximus comments in relation to the petition, 'give us today our daily/supersubstantial bread', it is

on account of the life in the Spirit that we are content to use the present life in such a way so as not to refrain from sustaining it with bread alone or from **end p.239** keeping up its good physical health, so far as it lies within our power, not in order to live but rather in order to live for God. This way we establish the body—rendered rational by the virtues—as a messenger of the soul, and by its steadfastness in the good we make the soul a herald of God. [164]

[164] *Or.dom*. 619-25 (CCSG 23. 62-3).

If to use something correctly is to use it according to its true nature or *logos*—a fact determined by its divinely given, teleologically directed *skopos*—then the *skopos* of all things is itself determined by their consummation in 'perfect love'. Maximus makes this clear by means of a striking juxtaposition of 'purpose' and 'use' in the following two paragraphs:

God alone is good by nature, and only the one who imitates God is good by will. For it is God's purpose (σκοπό) to unite evildoers to himself who is good by nature that they may become good. That is why when reviled by them, he blesses; when persecuted, he endures; when blasphemed, he entreats; when murdered, he intercedes. He does all things in order not to fall away from the purpose of love, which is God himself.

The Lord's commandments teach us to use indifferent things in a correct way. The appropriate use (ἡ εὔλογος χρῆσις) of indifferent things purifies the state of the soul; the pure state of the soul gives rise to discernment, which gives rise to imperturbability, from which is begotten perfect love (ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη). [165]

[165] *Car.* 4.90-1 (PG 90. 1069cd).

There is a certain paradox here that conveniently leads us into our final section on deification as suffering and death. The right use of the soul's passible faculties or of created realities requires a discernment of and living openness to the divine *skopos* hidden deep down in the structure of the universe, unveiled in its most naked form as suffering love in the Lord's passion and death, and incarnately filled out through the Christian's own fulfilment of the twofold command of love. Such 'filling out' involves a mysterious reciprocity between the activity and passivity on the part of the human person. Our proper (active) use of created realities and of our own affective drives is inextricably bound up with our (passive) submission to and experience of the divinely willed purpose for the whole human microcosm with all its constituent, and even morally marginal, components. We can do no better than to draw on Blowers yet again in support of our concluding remarks:

If passion (πάθος) bespeaks the primal Adamic and historic experience, the tragic loss of integrity suffered within the differentiated levels and aspects **end p.240** of human nature, so ultimately will passion bespeak the profound experience in which that nature regains its wholeness in Christ and receives its full share in the divine life. Not surprisingly, Maximus describes 'deification' in terms not only of perfected spiritual knowledge and virtue, or as the christlike exercise of free choice by the saints in the eschaton, but also, dramatically, as a sublime experience (πεῖρα), a pleasurable suffering (πεῖσις), a 'supernatural passion' (ὑπὲρ φύσιν τὸ πάθος) wherein the creature's utter *passivity* to divine grace is but a consummation of the *active* powers in human nature. [166]

[166] Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul', 81-2.

DEIFICATION AS SUFFERING AND DEATH

George Berthold once suggestively referred in a footnote to suffering as 'the tropos of deification', [167]

[167] *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 173 n. 57.

but did not go on to elaborate upon this theme. Yet as far as I can see it is the nearest one can come to answering the question at the heart of our study as to what happens to the body when it is deified. The short answer is: it suffers. Hidden beneath the outward bodily suffering of the saints, be it imposed voluntarily as ascesis or involuntarily as tribulation, lies their deifying passage 'from glory to glory'. And, not unlike the universal human *pathos* that in von Balthasar's words 'runs through all gestures of existence', this deifying suffering also 'reaches a peak in the riddle of death'. [168]

[168] *Theo-Drama*, iv. 117.

Death, as we have seen for Maximus, can only properly be understood and interpreted christologically. The 'living death' that the first Adam 'fashioned for himself' and, in him,

for the whole of human nature through his eating of the forbidden fruit is nothing more than the inevitable consequence of his rejection of the true bread of heaven, associated with the tree of life, that alone 'gives life to the world' (John 6: 33).[169]

[169] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1156c-1157a).

Death is not simply a biological event. It is separation from God.[170]

[170] *Car*. 2.93 (PG 90. 1016b): θάνατο μέν ἐστι κυρίω ὁ του θεου χωρισμό .

It is a power that interrupts the very *genesis* of human nature from the outset and corrupts its progress in such a way that true life can never quite take hold. As Maximus explains:

For if death is the corruption of generation (φθορὰ γενέσεω), and if the body, generated by a constant flow of nourishment, is naturally corrupted, being dissipated by flux, then Adam preserved death in a **end p.241** flourishing condition by means of the elements that he thought to be the source of life.[171]

[171] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1156d).

This is by now a familiar *topos* for us in the Confessor's writings, yet each time he tells the story there are new metaphors and unexpected shades of nuance. And this passage from *Ambiguum* 10 is no exception. Through his fall from divine life, the first man accepted death as 'father of another life' in exchange for the paternal, life-giving Word of God. But as it turns out this surrogate is a cruel tyrant who devours the human nature begotten by him, 'turning us into fodder' (ἡμα βρωσιν ποιούμενο). Thus 'we never actually come to live [in this life] at all, since we are always being eaten up by him through corruption'.[172]

[172] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1157a).

Suffering and death under this regime are anything but deifying. They are on the contrary the 'most just' penalty of sin in human nature.[173]

[173] *Q.Thal*. 61.36-76 (CCSG 22. 87-9).

As we might expect, Maximus follows this pitiful description of the Adamic state with an equally vivid account of its reversal. But in this case Maximus considers not so much the reversal achieved in the particular events of Christ's life and death, but that consequentially learned, taught, and practised by the saints as spiritual artisans. They recognize that this futile existence of constant change 'is not the life originally given by God', teaching instead that there is 'another, divine life' that can only be attained by putting aside the present life. And 'since there is no putting aside of life without death',

they devised (ἐπενόησαν) the rejection of carnal affection to be its death, for through this affection death has gained entry into life. Their aim was that, devising a death by means of death, they might cease from living through death and die an honourable death before the Lord, a death that is really the death of death—a death able to corrupt corruption and to provide an entry way in the worthy for the blessed and incorruptible life.[174]

[174] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1157c).

Is Maximus here advocating some kind of masochistic, morbid engagement in a mimetics of violence? Far from it. Bodily suffering has no merit in itself. Those who vainly exalt bodily hardship as though it were an ultimate end 'turn the Word into flesh in themselves in a blameworthy manner (ψεκτω)'.[175]

[175] *Th.Oec*. 2.42 (PG 90. 1144bc).

Suffering only glorifies God when endured 'for the sake of virtue',[176]

[176] *Th.Oec*. 2.72 (PG 90. 1157b).

and virtue **end p.242** itself is subordinate to truth. [177]

[177] *Q.Thal*. 30.14-23 (CCSG 7. 219).

Even the Saviour became a human being 'not to suffer, but to save'. [178]

[178] *Opusc*. 3 (PG 91. 48c); *Q.Thal*. 63.435-8 (CCSG 22. 173).

The ascetic life which, in all its intricate, finely tuned details—fasting, almsgiving, vigils, psalmody, prayer, not to mention the 'relentless ascesis of social relations' [179]

[179] Brown, *Body and Society*, 227.

characteristic of a monasticism formed in the desert—amounts to 'the rejection of carnal affection' (τὴν ἀποβολὴν τῆς κατὰ σάρκα στοργῆς), is a sagacious scheme carefully concocted and actively adopted by the saints to bring about the death of death and to furnish a space in the Christian for the reception of real, divine life. Just as the sheepskins worn by the early Egyptian monks reminded them that through their life of ascetic contest they were bearing about in their bodies the death of Jesus (2 Cor. 4: 10), the sacrificial lamb, [180]

[180] Evag. *Prak.prol*. 37-41 (SC 171. 488-90).

so does the Christian's voluntary adoption of suffering for Christ's sake in the form of self-denial, rigorous spiritual discipline, and love of one's enemies fulfil that bodily mortification under which is anticipated and manifested the divine life of the coming age. Future participation in the eschatological glory of Christ's resurrection life presupposes that we have already (ἤδη) become sharers in the likeness of his death (σύμφυτοι…τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ) through suffering. [181]

[181] *Amb.Io*. 31 (PG 91. 1281b). Cf. Romans 6: 5.

Baptism, naturally enough, is the sacrament of initiation into this apparently peculiar way of life-through-death. The very dramatic details of the rite—immersion in water and re-emergence from its drowning depths—already mark out on the physical body of the candidate the precise pattern (τύπον) of entombment and resurrection, each of which corresponds to a particular stage in the overall divine economy and whose final archetype is other-worldly. [182]

[182] *QD* 115.3-7 (CCSG 10. 84).

Thus 'he who through baptism fulfils the pattern of entombment and resurrection here in the present (ἐνταῦθα) should expect at the proper time (καιροῖς ἰδίοις) actually to become the all-perfect resurrection'. [183]

[183] *QD* 115.9-12 (CCSG 10. 84).

While those baptized into Christ through the Spirit receive 'the first incorruptibility' at a bodily, contingent level (κατὰ σάρκα), they only receive 'the final incorruptibility according to Christ in the Spirit in guarding undefiled the first **end p.243** incorruptibility by augmenting it with good works and the intentional death' of self-mortification. [184]

[184] *Th.Oec*. 1.87 (PG 90. 1120b).

At another level of interpretation, the Lord's own baptism in blood on the cross prefigures the baptismal, voluntary, and intentional (κατὰ πρόθεσιν) sufferings of the Christian for the sake of virtue. 'Through these, washing away the stains of conscience, we admit the voluntary death of our faculty of freewill in its preference for visible phenomena…. [185]

[185] The mortification of one's faculty of free choice (προαίρεσις) is a necessary adjunct to the mortification of sin. Both are actively put to death by means of practising virtue. But the practice

of virtue also contains a principle of resurrection that, leaving sin dead, raises up a renewed προαί

ρεσι so that, 'completely dead and wholly separated from anything dead, the faculty of free will may be insensible to sin, and that, being fully alive in an inseparable union it may become sensible to the totality of living virtue'. See *Q.Thal*. 59.190-207 (CCSG 22. 57).

On behalf of virtue it puts to death our preference for the pleasures of life.' [186]

[186] *Q.Thal*. 30.5-8, 14-16 (CCSG 7. 219).

Maximus distinguishes this baptism from the 'cup' mentioned by Jesus in the same passage of Scripture (Mark 10: 38). The cup which Jesus drinks 'is a type of the involuntary trials for the sake of truth that, contrary to our intent, arise against us out of circumstances. Through these, preferring desire for God to nature itself, we readily submit to the circumstantial death of nature.' [187]

[187] *Q.Thal*. 30.9-13 (CCSG 7. 219).

With this distinction between voluntary and involuntary sufferings or trials we arrive at an especially prominent aspect of Maximus' ascetic teaching whose roots lie in Origen's *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*. Maximus however makes subtle connections between this and his other distinctions that more clearly allow for the conversion of satanic temptations into the God-given instruments for the ascetic's spiritual formation. [188]

[188] One of the more comprehensive treatments of this subject is found in *Q.Thal*. 58.1-180 (CCSG 22. 27-37), in which Maximus responds to Thalassius' question as to how it is possible, in accordance with 1 Peter 1: 6 and James 1: 2, to rejoice in trials when they are the apparent source of grief.

There are, first of all, two kinds of temptation whose source is devilish and that exploit our sense-based liability to the vicious dialectic of pleasure and pain. One is pleasurable

(ἡδονικό), chosen (προαιρετικό), and voluntary (ἑκούσιο); the other is

painful (ὀδυνηρό), unwelcome (ἀπροαίρετο), and involuntary (ἀκούσιο). The former begets sin and is to be avoided; the latter constitutes a **end p.244** just penalty for sin, and trials of this sort are to be endured as purificatory and 'as coming with God's consent'. [189]

[189] *Or.dom*. 800-27 (CCSG 23. 72-3).

The aim of the Christian, however, is to anticipate these physically painful, involuntary trials—voluntarily. Self-judgement and self-humiliation are enacted signs that the Christian recognizes the salutary character of divine judgement by which he cooperates with God's corrective, purgative economy. So we find Maximus saying in the *Centuries on Love*:

Nearly every sin is committed for pleasure, and its removal comes about through distress and grief (whether voluntary or involuntary), through repentance, or through any additional dispensation introduced by providence. For it says 'if we were to judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are being chastened by the Lord lest we be condemned with the world' (1 Cor. 11: 31-2).

When a trial comes upon you unexpectedly, do not blame him through whom it has come. Instead seek out why it has come, then you will find correction. For whether it comes through one source or through another, you still have to take the bitter wormwood of God's judgements. [190]

[190] *Car*. 2.41-2 (PG 90. 907b-1000a). See also *LA* 22.380-92 (CCSG 40. 43-5).

The voluntary subjection to trial through the active elimination of passionate attachments to the material order, the relentless scrutiny of vain self-opinions of the soul, and the

unceasing elevation of one's neighbour and even one's enemies over oneself—all of which from a human perspective look like death—actually spell passage into immortal life. [191]

[191] *Or.dom*. 694-700 (CCSG 23. 66).

Those who adopt this way of life become insensitive to physical pain. [192]

[192] *Or.dom*. 646-7 (CCSG 23. 64).

They are already 'dead' and 'judged in the flesh' (1 Pet. 4: 6), for 'in a hidden way they "bear about in their body the death of Jesus" (2 Cor. 4: 10)'. [193]

[193] *Q.Thal*. 7.28-41 (CCSG 7. 73-5).

Death no longer threatens the nature which through baptism has been 'innovated afresh', but serves only to mortify and condemn sin in it. This is what Maximus calls 'death's active use' (τὴν τοῦ θανάτου χρῆσιν ἐνεργουμένην) [194]

[194] *Q.Thal*. 61.235-6 (CCSG 22. 99).

—the application at the individual level of what is accomplished universally in Christ—which is initiated at baptism and finds fulfilment through suffering. The Christian who guards his baptism through keeping the commands 'uses' death in **end p.245** participatory imitation of Christ as a mysterious escort toward the divine and everlasting life. [195]

[195] *Q.Thal*. 61.236-60 (CCSG 22. 99).

From this kind of evidence Maximus can offer a theological verdict and conclude that it is in fact wrong to call the natural termination (τὸ πέρας) of this present life 'death'. It is rather

deliverance from death, separation from corruption, escape from violation, the cessation of trouble, the removal of wars, the receding of darkness, rest from labours, the silencing of confused hubbub, quiet from excitement, the veiling of shame, flight from the passions, the disappearing of sin, and, in brief, the termination of all evils. Succeeding at all this through voluntary mortification, the saints commended themselves as 'aliens and refugees' in this life (Heb. 11: 13). [196]

[196] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1157cd).

The fact that the holy women and men of old are said already to have 'succeeded' or achieved (κατορθώσαντες) in this life what normally is only ushered in at bodily death also suggests that there is a way in which this voluntary use of death may be considered the actual visible, outward, physical experience of deification more than simply by hopeful yet unrealized anticipation. Here we shall be led to regard once again Maximus' abiding sensitivity to the essentially prophetic character of the monastic life, being as it is a liminal, veiled, but nonetheless real embarkation upon the heavenly life. This heightened sense of the liminality of the monk's bodily life is as much brought on by theological factors as by existential. Perhaps the most exquisite example of Maximian thought in which this problem is addressed is an exegetical meditation on the tension raised by an apparent biblical discrepancy in two references to 'ages' (αἰῶνες). For if, Thalassius asks, 'in the coming ages God will demonstrate his riches' (Eph. 2: 7), how then has 'the fulfilment (τὰ τέλη) of the ages already come for us' (1 Cor. 10: 11)? [197]

[197] *Q.Thal*. 22.1-3 (CCSG 7. 137).

In his answer Maximus first refers to the creator's plan, established before the beginning of all creation, to become man and to make man God through the hypostatic union. From here he takes the two biblical references to fulfilled and coming ages as an indication that

God wisely divided the ages into those intended for the activity of his becoming man, and those intended for the activity of man's being made God. [198]

[198] *Q.Thal*. 22.4-16 (CCSG 7. 137).

The former ages, 'intended for the activity of the mystery of his embodiment', were **end p.246** accomplished through the events of the incarnation themselves (κατὰ τὴν σάρκωσιν δι᾽αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων). Consequently they have reached their proper conclusion (τὸ οἰκεῖον πέρας). [199]

[199] *Q.Thal*. 22.17-27 (CCSG 7. 137).

The ages intended for 'the mystical and ineffable deification of humanity', however, and in which God 'will demonstrate the immeasurable richness of his kindness towards us' (Eph. 2: 7), still await their actual and total fulfilment. [200]

[200] *Q.Thal*. 22.28-49 (CCSG 7. 137-9).

This at least is how Maximus concludes his first meditation on the distinction between the ages of God's incarnation and the ages of man's deification as suggested by the apostle's deliberate distinction between 'fulfilled' and 'coming' ages. It is, he adds, not unlike the distinction between deification by potentiality and deification in actuality. [201]

[201] *Q.Thal*. 22.60-5 (CCSG 7. 139).

But his point that it is merely a conceptual distinction (τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ) [202]

[202] *Q.Thal*. 22.50 (CCSG 7. 139).

rather than an actual chronological sequence tells us that he is far from simply putting deification into a future chronological category accessible at the resurrection of the dead. Typically enough Blowers has recognized exactly the same point in his cogent analysis of the text:

To ascribe such a state of being purely to a future glory beyond death…would be inaccurate, for this is in fact a mystery that spans the whole 'natural' life of human creatures. Ontologically speaking, the mystery of deification coincides with the full 'history' of human nature, a nature which receives definition precisely by its ongoing openness to gracious restoration and transformation. [203]

[203] Blowers, 'Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 22', 262-3.

What allows us to draw this conclusion is Maximus' remaining meditation in which he couples the distinction between the 'past' ages of God's incarnation and the 'future' ages of man's deification with 'the principle of activity' or acting (ὁ τοῦ ποιεῖν λόγος) on the one hand and 'the principle of passivity' or being acted upon (ὁ τοῦ πάσχειν λόγος) on the other. [204]

[204] See Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 133 n. 19, for the philosophical sources for this distinction.

The ages of the flesh in which we now conduct our lives are characterized by activity, whereas the future ages of the Spirit are characterized by passivity and its transformation under the influence of divine activity. Whereas the **end p.247** potential available to us in this life is only fulfilled by constant ascetic activity by which God is made flesh in the virtues, entry into the coming age is marked by our ceasing from activity and our passive experience of deification by grace, an experience whose bounds are as infinite as the divine activity of the one who acts upon us. [205]

[205] *Q.Thal*. 22.66-79 (CCSG 7. 139-41).

But now we must quote in full:
For this reason we do not cease from being deified. For at that point passivity is supernatural, and possesses no inherent factor that precludes those who suffer divine activity from being infinitely deified. For we are active in so far as we possess both the rational faculty which being activated naturally performs the virtues, as well as the intellectual faculty which is capable of all knowledge and which at the level of potentiality passes directly through every being we know and leaves all the ages behind it. And we are passive when, completely traversing the inner principles of beings that come from non-being, we come in a state of ignorance to the cause of those beings and bring our own faculties to rest along with those things that are naturally finite, becoming that which our own natural powers could in no way achieve, since nature has no power to grasp that which transcends nature. For nothing created is by nature capable of deification, since it is incapable of grasping God. For it is intrinsic and peculiar to divine grace alone to bestow deification proportionately on beings, for only divine grace illuminates nature with supernatural light and elevates nature beyond its proper limits in excess of glory. [206]

[206] *Q.Thal*. 22.79-98 (CCSG 7. 141).

The remarkable passage of nature from activity to passivity described here hopefully clarifies our claim that deification is manifest bodily as suffering. Deification is concealed and at the same time disclosed in the Christian life through the visible, external marks of ascetic activity and voluntary suffering, both of which simply form the dual modes of faith embodied in love. But of these two modes it is voluntary suffering reaching its summit in bodily death that most poignantly bears witness to the actual presence of God's deifying activity here in 'the shadow of death'. [207]

[207] *Car*. 2.96 (PG 90. 1016c).

Nature's passivity, the full conclusion of its natural activity, provides the raw material par excellence with which God's infinite activity elevates that same nature and overwhelms it with his glory. In this sense passivity paradoxically constitutes a superior ontological order that, chronologically speaking, may coexist with the active state characteristic of nature's progression to its goal by **end p.248** the use of its natural powers. What appears under the outward form of 'dying daily' as the curtailment or diminution of those natural powers is in fact their very fulfilment in passivity, by which Maximus means total submission by grace to God in Christ.

With these comments we come to the end of this chapter. We have seen how the ancient philosophical ideal of making this life a preparation for death is for Maximus inseparable from baptismal participation in the death of Christ and the increasing adornment of faith in him through works of virtue and suffering love. We are reminded of the intensely social dimensions which Maximus' conception of this spiritual journey presumes. Love of those who know only hatred and hostility is the first step to liberation from the very things that stand as obstacles in the path toward imitating the God who loves all people equally and 'wants them to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2: 4). [208]

[208] *Car*. 1.61 (PG 90. 973a); cf. 1.62 (PG 90. 973ab); 1.71-4 (PG 90. 976b-977a).

It is on account of its social character—its presupposition of an object other than oneself—that love must above all else be suffered. But in the ecstatic going out of oneself that love demands one enters into actual union with love's object, and so into union with God. Or as Maximus so beautifully has it,

For the sake of love the saints all resist sin to the very end, taking no account of this present life and enduring many forms of death, in order that they may be gathered from this world to themselves and to God, and unite in themselves the torn fragments of nature. [209]

[209] *Ep*. 2 (PG 91. 404d).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Maximus' teaching on deification as suffering and death is the fact that he embodied it in his own life, and most painfully in his trial, torture, exile, and death at the hands of his ecclesiastical enemies. Inspired by the biographer who penned the events following his trial and leading to his first exile to Bizya (655), we can perhaps only imagine the aged monk's joy in being called to fill up in his own body the sufferings of Christ. We can only imagine his thanksgiving when crying aloud he exhorted, 'Pray for the Lord's sake that with our humiliation God may perfect his mercy, and may teach us that those who sail along with him experience a savage sea….' All his sufferings and those of his companions he no doubt would have recognized as the gracious gift of God and participation in the death **end p.249** of Christ, gifts offered to man that he might not trust in himself but attribute his salvation to God alone. [210]

[210] *RM* 479-85 (CCSG 39. 49-51).

Hunger, thirst, nakedness, chains and prisons, exiles and scourges, cross, nails, vinegar and gall, spitting and slaps, and blows and mockings: all this bodily torment has for its end
a radiant resurrection, bringing peace with it to those who have been persecuted on his account, and joy to those who were afflicted for him, and ascension into heaven and accession at the Father's transcendent throne, and 'an appointed place above every principality and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that can be named—whether in this age or in the age to come' (Eph. 1: 21). [211]

[211] *RM* 498-504 (CCSG 39. 51). end p.250

Conclusion

Having arrived at the conclusion of our study, we may return to the question raised at the very beginning in the introduction: what happens to the body when it is deified?

Reviewing the vista of St Maximus' thought analysed and discussed in these past five chapters, we have found the answer first of all to depend on his vision of the universe as the cosmic theatre of divine theophany. Material reality functions as a single though indispensable dimension of a multi-faceted symbolic pedagogy that engages the soul through history, Scripture, Christ, and Church. By concealing himself within these analogous yet irreducibly distinct physical media, the invisible God has affirmed the corporeal world—bodily and cosmic—as an essential means of access to intelligible reality and as the providential locus of communion between creature and creator.

This pedagogical function of the material cosmos in turn depends upon the existence of a stable metaphysical substructure according to which the universe was created out of nothing by God and continues to subsist. Notwithstanding humanity's fall from its original, natural course as envisaged by the creator, God's immutable will, in which the multitude of divine 'intentions' or *logoi* of creation have their common source, remains unchanged. In the express desire of God the Word to become embodied 'always and in all' lies the possibility of fallen creation's return to and fulfilment of its true

destiny. And in the incarnation, established in history in the person and work of Jesus Christ and worked out in the lives of the baptized, that possibility has become an empirical fact. Deified creation already exists, 'wholly deified', as the body of Christ.

Within this scheme, St Maximus, at once faithful to the primary lines of tradition in the Greek Fathers as well as their creative interpreter, can therefore accord to the body—and thus to the historical, ecclesial, and material cosmic orders—a definitive, constitutive place in God's creative, saving, and sanctifying economies. The chaotic element (τὸ ἄτακτον) in material diversity **end p.251** is overcome not by the elimination of matter, but by its incarnational, ascetic, sacramental, and liturgical incorporation into Christ. Just as Adam's sin, whose consequences come into effect 'at the very moment' of our generation, short-circuited the immediate passage from creation to deification and introduced distance between them in the form of bodily, historical existence, so the hypostatic union, by means of which both history and cosmos are reunited in a supernatural *modus operandi*, affirms the positive function of corporeal differentiation as it is reconfigured by providence and transfigured by grace. Considered in and of themselves, according to their empirical, post-lapsarian constitution, history and cosmos can only be understood punitively. Only by reference to their end (τέλο) or purpose (σκοπ΄ο), concretely revealed in the holy flesh of Christ, can the original ontological trajectory of bodily diversity be realized. As Tollefsen summarizes:

[P]lurality is not a temporary phase in the history of the cosmos, a phase which in the consummation (τὸ τέλο , τὸ ε..σχατον) shall be surmounted and transcended when everything arrives at an *undifferentiated unity*…. To the degree that cosmic plurality in 'this age' is ridden by sinful separations, it should be transcended; yet there exists an original metaphysical tension between unity and plurality which belongs to the created order as such, and this tension is ineliminable. [1]

[1] Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 91.

This does not, however, amount to an unqualified primacy of the bodily, external, or particular. Unlike the soul, the body is not self-subsistent. Its existence is borrowed, coming from outside itself via the rational soul, and apart from its subordinate relationship to the soul the body drags human nature into the diffuse chaos of sensual pleasure and material irrationality. 'All visible things need a cross', says Maximus in a disarmingly realistic analysis of empirical human nature. That is to say, all corporeal phenomena—including the human body—need some critical means of limiting the scope and influence of their sensual, affective impulses. [2]

[2] *Th.Oec*. 1.67 (PG 90. 1108b).

We have agreed with Peter Brown that for ancient Christian monasticism, in contrast to pagan intellectualism, '[t]he material conditions of the monk's life were held capable of altering the consciousness itself'. [3]

[3] *Body and Society*, 237.

But we have also seen that this capacity is held by Maximus to be in need of qualification by the condition of 'use', whose rightness is **end p.252** determined not only by the intent of the subject, but by the agreement that utility shares with the divinely given order and purpose of created things according to their respective inherent *logoi*.

All of this might suggest that Maximus' commitment to the primacy of spirit would preclude any concession to the material order of an importance beyond its contingent, secondary ontological status. Yet, on the basis of the mystery of the incarnation, it is exclusively in the harmony proper to this contingent, subordinate relation that all material phenomena, including the body, exceed their finite boundaries and so become vehicles of divine theophany. To the extent that in this life the soul is adorned with the virtues, in which God the Word takes on visible, fleshly contours, the body—no less than the soul—already 'suffers' deification, anticipating under the veil of humility and mortification its glorious participation in the soul's future beatitude. With this kind of *Leidensmystik* or 'mysticism of suffering' [4]

[4] Von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 275 n. 3.

we are clearly far from gnosticism. For, as von Balthasar rightly concludes, a

knowledge of God without *pathos* does not yet lead the mind to its full distance from earthly things…. If someone's mind is always directed to God, his desires have already grown beyond themselves (῾υπερηύξησεν) into a longing for God, his affectivity is completely transformed into love of God; the earthly part of him is translated into something divine and more closely connected and tied with God. So love itself becomes a 'divine passion', 'the blessed passion of [holy] love'. [5]

[5] Ibid., 342; ET Daley, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 342.

Perhaps to our disappointment, Maximus does not spell out in detail the shape or physical features of the fully deiform body, although he allows us to speculate that it will be a perfected version of Adam's body before the fall: truly corporeal, yet entirely free from divisive, corrupting qualities. [6]

[6] *Amb.Io*. 45 (PG 91. 1353ab).

The bodily resurrection of Christ and his ascension into heaven adumbrate the passage of the material order with the soul into a transcendent realm where the passible and corporeal become entirely transparent to divine glory. This is the ultimate point of the cross: it leads to resurrection. [7]

[7] *Amb.Io*. 10 (PG 91. 1145b).

Thus the very integrity of the material order lies in its being transcended. In this Maximus says nothing new. He simply **end p.253** articulates the tradition in a new, strikingly original way, and to some degree corrects various extremes by drawing them back to their centre in the incarnate Word.

Whatever ambivalence remains, then, is not in Maximus' attitude towards the body, but in the body itself, its senses, and the physical realm. All depends on their being referred to a reality beyond, but not apart from themselves. To enshrine the historical, contingent, material, and outward for its own sake draws us not only into '[a]berrant metaphysics', [8]

[8] See Jeffrey C. Eaton, 'The Primacy of Spirit', in Eric O. Springstead (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 95.

but into idolatry. The alternative is not 'spiritualization', if by that we mean reducing the universe to idealistic abstraction and irrevocably disengaging from the material order. It is rather 'spiritual life', or better, life in the Spirit, by which we mean participation in the divine life of the holy Trinity, an impossible possibility rendered accessible sacramentally in the bodily, divine-human life of one of that same holy Trinity. In that divine-human life alone is flesh made holy and human nature wholly deified. There alone is the mystery of deification actualized in the plenitude of its corporeal contours. There alone is the purpose of the universe fulfilled, and God 'proclaimed to be truly a Father by grace'. [9]

[9] *Or.dom*. 791-2 (CCSG 23. 71).**end p.254**

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